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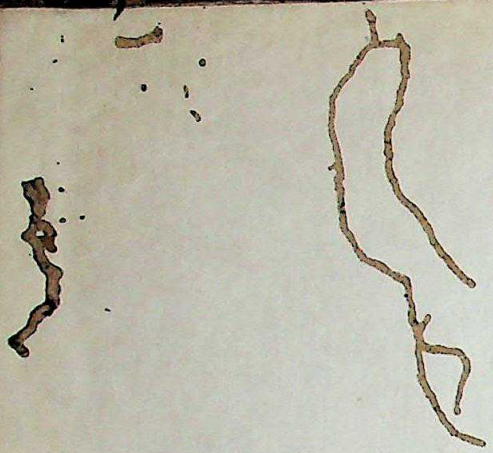

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INDIA TODAY
OCTOBER 15, 1988
THE COMPLETE NEWSMAGAZINE

J.R.D. TAT

TATAS: IN TRANSITION
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: J.R.D. TATA
BURMA: UNDER THE GUN

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USSR Triple Gold Medallist Dmitri Bilozerchev

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INDIA: SHAME AT SEOUL

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Eastern Bloc-buster

There were many magic moments at the XXIV Olympiad. Never before had so many stars been made and unmade and so many records broken. But the Eastern Bloc's domination was near-total while India's performance was nothing short of disastrous.

COVER STORY 78

One Step Forward

The formal launch of the seven-party National Front at Madras last fortnight was an impressive show of unity and cohesion. Yet differences continued to simmer beneath the surface, with the leaders often adopting contradictory stands. An analysis.

SPECIAL REPORTS 24

A Summer of Torment

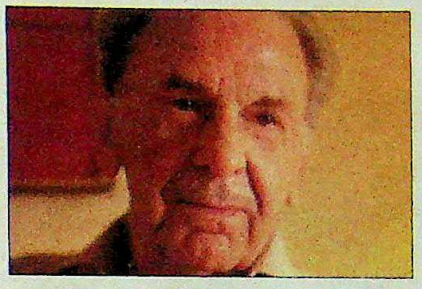
Less than two years after the National Conference-Congress(I) alliance came to power in Kashmir, religious fundamentalism, violence and corruption stalk the valley, while Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah appears increasingly helpless. An in-depth report.

SPECIAL REPORTS 32

Under the Gun

As the army grabbed power in Burma last fortnight, the nascent democratic revolution was thrown into disarray with many student and opposition leaders forced to go underground. A report on what it means for Burma and the probable course of future events.

SPECIAL REPORTS 38



A Transfer of Power

The house of Tatas is in a state of flux. J.R.D. Tata is relinquishing control. A top manager was in line for Tata's post as group chairman, but lost out. And Tata now expresses his preference for his nephew Ratan. A report.

BUSINESS 100

An Ode to the Common Man

In Ketan Mehta's *Hero Hiralal*, the small town hick has finally turned hero. The film unravels a world created by cinematic illusion, the life and times of the lovable, outrageously foppish Hiralal—who sees every film "first day, first show".

CINEMA 144

CONTENTS

COMMENT 11
CAPITALOOK 12
VOICES 14
INDIANOTES 19
THE FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 22
SPECIAL REPORTS
National Front: One Step Forward 24
Defamation Bill: Conceding Defeat 28
Jammu & Kashmir:
A Summer of Torment 32
Burma: Under the Gun 38
CURRENT EVENTS
Rajasthan: Turning a Blind Eye 44
Punjab: Misplaced Expectations 46
Punjab: Toll Tales 50
Madhya Pradesh: A New Drive 55
Assam: Disaster Politics 56
Andhra Pradesh: Grain Drain 62
Karnataka: Mob Mayhem 67
West Bengal:
An Expensive Ritual 68
Kerala: Lucky Streak 70
Modi Murder: Trial and Error 75
STATENOTES 76
COVER STORY
XXIV Olympiad:
Eastern Bloc-Buster 78
India: Shame at Seoul 87
NEIGHBOURS
Bangladesh: Sea of Misery 93
TRADE WINDS 99
BUSINESS
The Tatas: A Transfer of Power 100
Medical Electronics:
Hi-Tech Gizmos 114
Consumer Credit: The Big Splurge 119
Gammon India: Under Siege 121
Processed Foods:
An Appetising Package 122
BUSINESSNOTES 128
THE ECONOMY MONITOR 135
The Markets: Good Times 137
THE ARTS
Tom Alter: A Man for All Seasons 138
HEALTH
Gujarat: Victims of Apathy 142
CINEMA
Hero Hiralal:
An Ode to the Common Man 144
RELIGION
The Sikhs: Wedding Banns 147
TELEVISION
Virasat: Message of Urgency 150
EDUCATION
Operation Blackboard:
An Empty Slate 157
BOOKS
Parsi Parade 163
Out from the Shadows 164
EYE-CATCHERS 168

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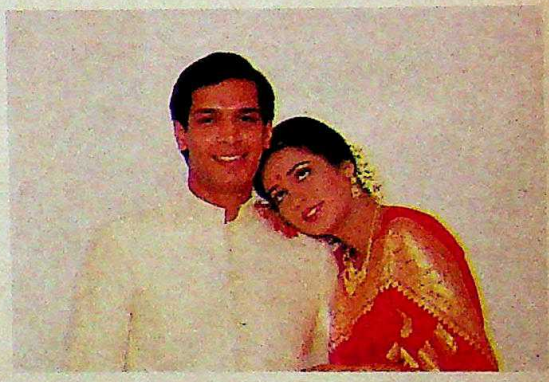

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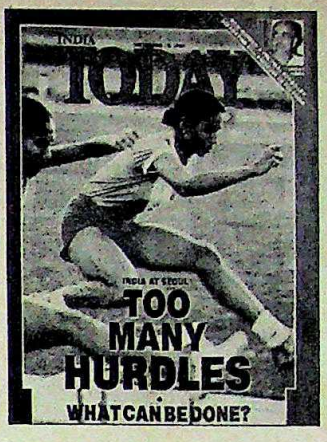

A SORRY TALE

If once every four years the Olympics explodes on the international scene like a supernova ("A Daunting Prospect," September 30), every four years our country also becomes the laughing stock at the Games. When tiny nations like Denmark and Jamaica have come away with a grab of medals, all we'll be able to do is return with downcast looks and empty hands.

Cuttack — DEBASHISH PANDA

■ It is only in the last couple of years that young men and women around the country and, most important, their parents, have begun to register the fact that sports represent a lucrative and highly rewarding career, and the initial investment in terms of time, effort and the money is well worth it. In developed nations, thanks to all the support extended by the governments and sports associations, such a realisation has already begun bringing in returns—in the form of a bagful of medals at the Olympics and other games.

Calcutta — SHIV K. KUMAR

■ Perhaps we need to give optimists like the Union Minister of State for Women, Youth Affairs and Sports, Margaret Alva, a fair chance. Though one has learnt not to expect too much, it just is possible that the new talent search schemes and the radical transformation in attitudes will see the country come into its own in the '90s.

Jamshedpur — R. SREEDHAR

MORE PATRIOTIC

However hateful a politician President Zia may have been ("Pakistan After Zia", September 15), he was a pious and virtuous man who lived a simple life. He came on to the political scene as a villain but exited as something of a hero. Indeed, he died a martyr's death.

Malegaon, Nasik — ILYAS KHURSHID

■ Every one has been criticising the late President Zia for nursing excessive political ambitions and perpetuating military rule in his country for a period of 11 years. But can anyone tell me which politician in the world is not selfishly power-hungry? Zia was more patriotic than our own politicians, who, with their insatiable appetites, are perennially busy filling their bursting bellies.

Lucknow — ANURADHA JULKA

■ There was speculation in the Pakistani press about an Indian hand in Zia's plane crash. This is not possible. The Indian Government has no calibre for such a thing. A government that cannot destroy the Pakistani Kahuta nuclear establishment does not have the calibre to destroy the Pakistani President.

Nagpur — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

LENDING VIGOUR

Regarding the Defamation Bill, ("Pressure on the Press", September 30) most sensible citizens of this country feel it will only serve to strengthen the hands of the press. It will lend more vigour to journalists who will now defy the bill and continue to explore our government's malfunctioning and corruption.

Ranchi — SWAGATO DE

PATHETIC FAILURE

Apropos your comment "Disunity Moves" (September 15), never before has any regime at the Centre been beset with as many scandals as the present one. But the so-called opposition parties have callously—and pathetically—failed to pose any threat to the powers that be, thanks to their mutual distrust and thirst for pelf and power.

Ahmedabad — M.V. RAVINDRAN

MIXED VIEWS

Your story "The Underground Army" (September 15) revealed the dirty game the Punjab Police is involved in. There must be so many Dalbirs who eliminated scores of people (adding to the tally of the militants), and made lakhs of rupees from innocent people under official protection. It is shameful that certain highly placed officials are patrons of such criminals.

Amritsar — B.S. VIRK

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■ Before we hastily condemn the police for resorting to vigilante groups, one should also look towards the results which have been achieved in the fight against terrorism. With the benefit of hindsight, one can say that the undercover operatives should be more strictly screened and should receive better remuneration on the basis of their performance in order to dissuade them from plundering and looting innocent people. Disbanding these groups will be no solution to this problem.

Bombay — DHANANJAY V. JOSHI

OBNOXIOUS ACT

A senior professor being manhandled by a bunch of rogues hiding behind the name of the Youth Congress(I), and thus being sheltered and protected by it, was an obnoxious act ("Test Furore", September 15). What one finds difficult to understand is whether the Congress(I) shelters the hooligans or the other way around.

Ujjain — NAMIT VAIDYA

FASCIST TRENDS

The Krishnatray incident at Sagar University, Sitaram Kesari's diatribe on the occasion of Arun Nehru's daughter's engagement, the Defamation Bill and the tear-gassing of opposition MPs all point to the kind of fascism gradually nurtured by Hitler in the 1930s. The Congress(I) hooligans are our country's Brown Shirts.

Bombay — V.N. GOUR

HIGHLY DISTRESSING

The report "A Devastating Dawn" (September 15) on the earthquake in Bihar has rightly observed that "taking the cue from Rajiv, both the Bihar Government and the Centre tried to play down the extent of damage". The bickering over the extent of damage has pained me and also many other citizens of the state, particularly those from the quake-affected areas. The inquiry against the Patna station of All India Radio for allegedly "presenting exaggerated reports on the earthquake in Bihar" and the Centre doubting Bihar's losses are very distressing.

Madhepura, Bihar — RAMESH CHANDRA YADAV

NOT THE LAST

With reference to the statenote "A Show of Courage" (September 15), as long as severe punishment is not meted out to the culprits involved in the assault on the Delhi college girl Monisha, such cases are bound to recur. An important factor in all this is westernisation. We are imitating western culture rapidly and consequently there is a lot of sexual frustration among the youth. This assumes the shape of victimisation of innocent women.

Kurnool — P. SIVARAM PRASAD

TRAGIC PLIGHT

Thank you for highlighting the pathetic suffering of Indian emigrant students qualifying as doctors from Nigerian universities ("Doctor No", August 31). I am a NRI from Nigeria and my daughter—who did her M.B.B.S. in 1987—remains unemployed. It seems as if even the prime minister's writ does not run in the corridors of the Medical Council of India (MCI), as reminders from his office have not stirred it a bit. God knows what type of motivation is needed to help save the lives and careers of all these doctors.

Bendel State, Nigeria — N.N. ARYA

■ Numerous requests for recognition of Nigerian medical degrees have been sent over the years to every imaginable quarter in the Government—including the past prime minister, the present one and to the MCI (singly and collectively) by affected doctors, students, parents and parents' associations, directly and through the Indian High Commission in Lagos, Nigeria. I suppose it is only to the President of India that an appeal has not been made. No results have come out of any of these attempts.

Trivandrum — T.J. MATHEW

WARPED PRIORITIES

With the reviving of the Pepsi deal ("Fizzing Again", September 15), the Government is in effect telling those without access to safe drinking water, and who are exposed to dangers like gastro-enteritis: "Let them drink Pepsi."

New Delhi — SUE DARLOW

A MIX UP

In our report "A Dream Turns Sour" (September 15), the photograph of the Assam PWD Minister, Atul Bora, was inadvertently used instead of the AASU secretary, Atul Bora.

The error is regretted.

—Editor

FALSE PREMISE

It is ridiculous to suggest, as the article on Apollo Hospitals ("Medical Inc", September 15) does, that these are an alternative to crowded state-run hospitals. In a country where at least 50 per cent of the people live below the poverty line, and 40 per cent of the remainder are not too far above, the average bill of Rs 10,000 is prohibitive. The comparison that a kidney transplant at Apollo costs Rs 80,000 whereas abroad the cost would be Rs 15 lakh is invidious, since both sums are equally out of reach for the average Indian.

Bilaspur — DR THOMAS GEORGE

BRIT TANTRUMS

Kenneth Griffith's outburst against Subhash Chandra Bose in his interview "Many scenes were cut" (September 15), was revolting. Doesn't he realise that every Indian will feel like "vomiting" at the thought of a person who calls Netaji "a Nazi of the worst kind"? Please remind him, lest he has forgotten, that we are no longer under the British Raj, and no more Brit tantrums please.

Jaipur — SHARMILA & GOUTOM CHATTERJEE

■ Griffith's attitudes towards Doordarshan and Indian officials remind us of the old British Raj. He has probably seen the British film *The Springing Tiger* on Subhash Chandra Bose and digested everything without hesitation. It's painful when a racist like Griffith is asked to make a film on Nehru, despite this country having so many world-renowned film makers.

Kishanganj, Bihar — TAPAS KUMAR BISWAS

SATANIC WORK

Apropos "An Irreverent Journey" (September 15), *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie can be described as the work of a true satan making Islam his target on the ground that he cannot compromise with its tenets.

Hyderabad — H. AHMED KHAN

■ From the review of Rushdie's book, it appears that the work contains derogatory statements about respected Muslim personalities and makes fun of revered events from Islamic history. The book is bound to hurt the religious sentiments of not only Muslims but all religious-minded people. The Government must ban *The Satanic Verses* before it is too late.

Bombay — AMIN JIWANI

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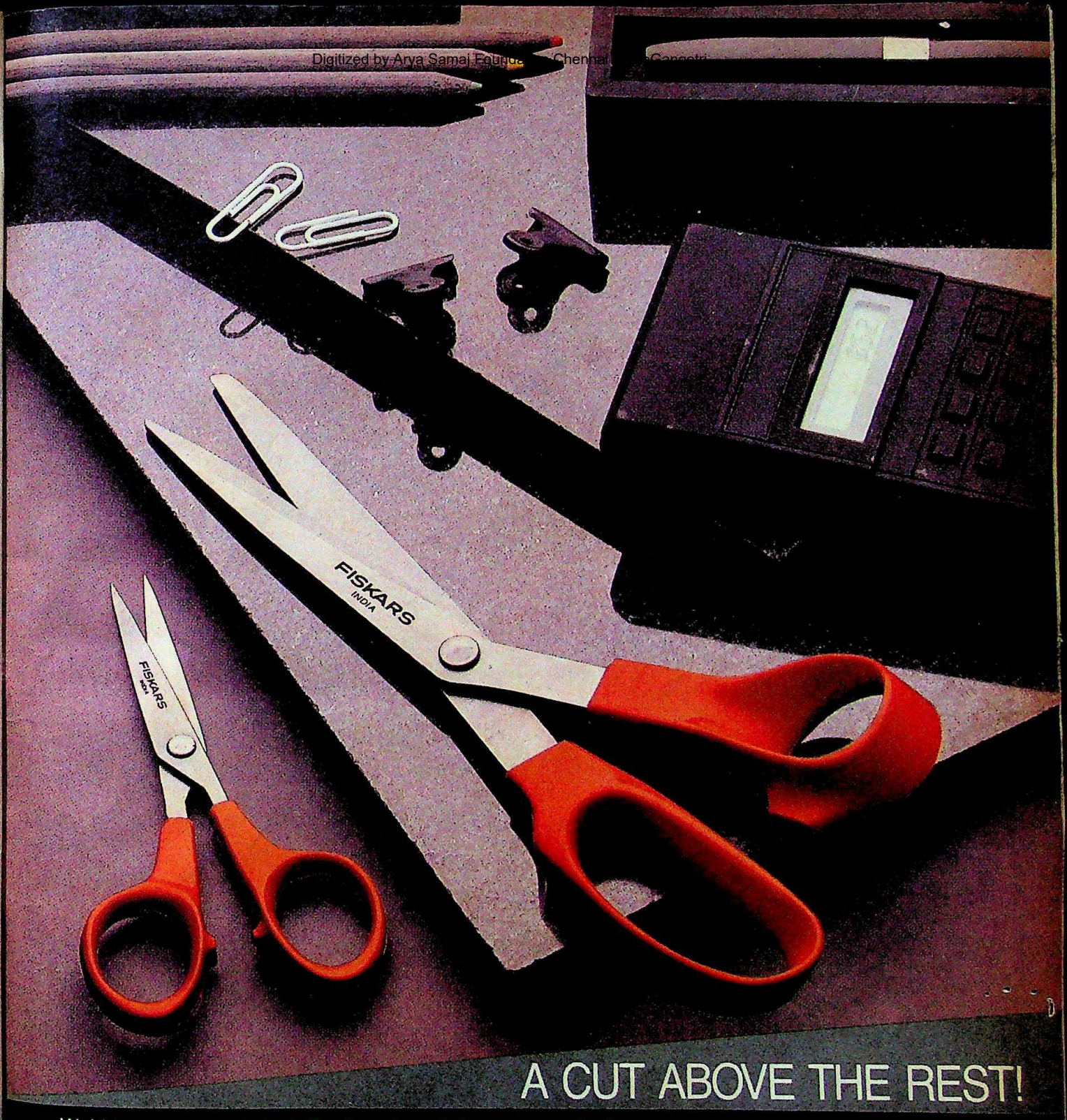

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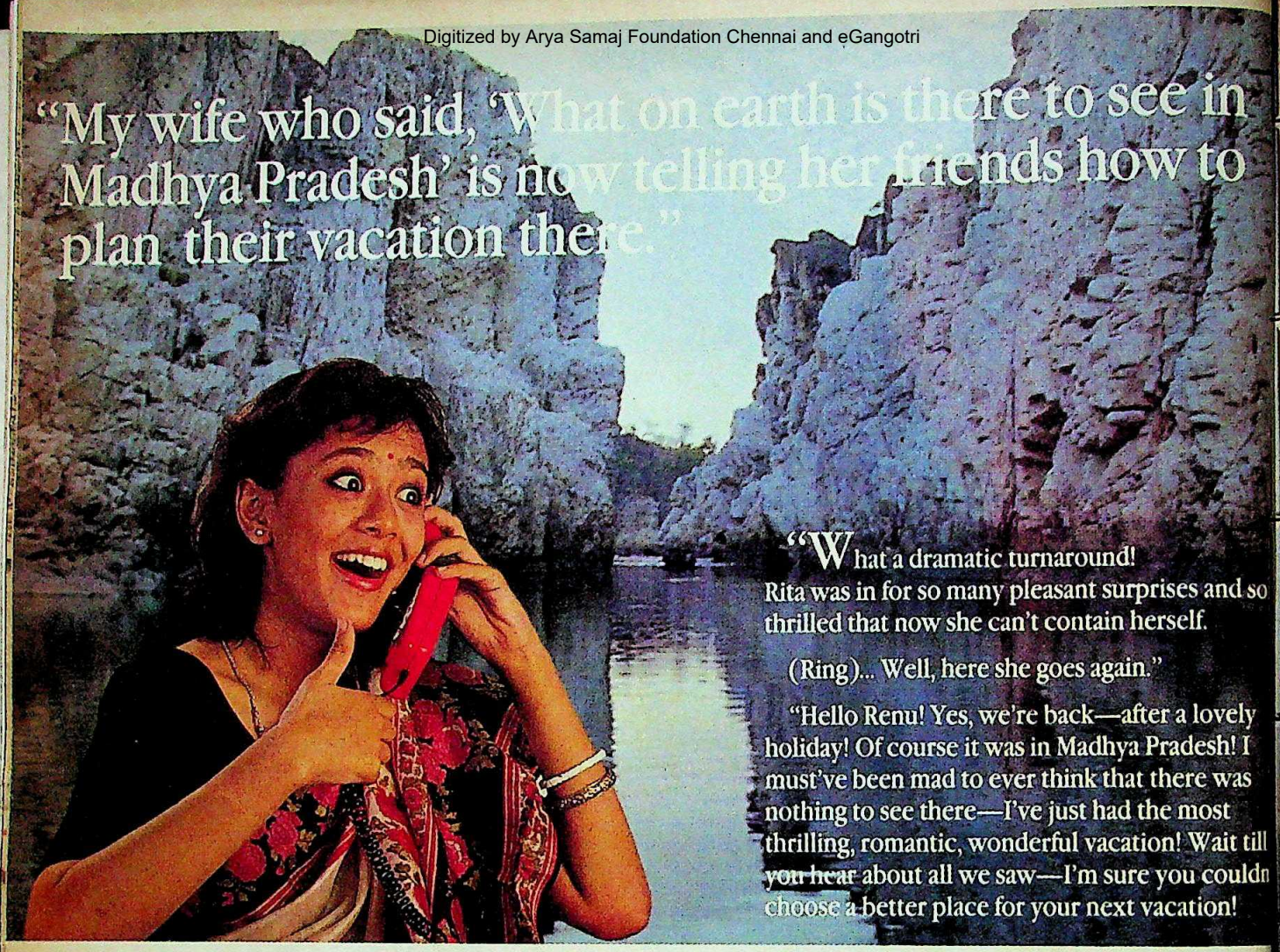
"My wife who said, 'What on earth is there to see in Madhya Pradesh' is now telling her friends how to plan their vacation there."



"What a dramatic turnaround! Rita was in for so many pleasant surprises and so thrilled that now she can't contain herself.

(Ring)... Well, here she goes again."

"Hello Renu! Yes, we're back—after a lovely holiday! Of course it was in Madhya Pradesh! I must've been mad to ever think that there was nothing to see there—I've just had the most thrilling, romantic, wonderful vacation! Wait till you hear about all we saw—I'm sure you couldn choose a better place for your next vacation!

You should begin your trip from **Gwalior**, as we did. The massive fort and battle scarred ramparts brought visions of booming cannons and clashing swords vividly alive.

From there we went to **Khajuraho**. The temples were exquisite—as if living, breathing beauty had magically been frozen into stone.

Our next stop was **Mandu**—the 'City of Joy'. The beautiful mahals seem to echo with the love songs of Roopmati and Baz Bahadur. We also saw Hoshang Shah's tomb, said to be the inspiration for the Taj.

Oh, d'you remember those Jataka Tales we read as kids? Well, they're all depicted on the gates of the Stupa at **Sanchi**, and it is so quiet that you can almost hear the silence.

And of course, we went boating by moonlight at the **Marble Rocks**. Pearly cliffs and the gentle splash of oars... wish we'd gone there for our honeymoon!

The biggest surprise was finding a hill station in Madhya Pradesh. **Pachmarhi** is just the place for picnics and lazing.

But Ramesh was itching to go tiger watching, so off we went on a safari—to **Kanha, Bandhavgarh** and **Shivpuri**. Funnily, our excitement hungry hero chickened out when it came to tiger tracking, so we watched chinkara, nilgai and chital instead.

While we were in **Bhopal** to see the Bharat Bhavan, Mum and Dad surprised us with a call—and promptly packed us off on a pilgrimage to **Ujjain, Omkareshwar and Maheshwar.**

What with all that to see and do our vacation just flew past! All too soon it was time to leave and so much we hadn't seen! The medieval city of **Orchha**, and the rock paintings at **Bhimbetka... Amarkantak**, and the legendary **Chitrakoot!**

Getting there? There are many well organised tours... Transport? You can choose from coaches, cars or jeeps. And there are log huts and tourist villages to stay in. You'll go next holidays? Great! Maybe we could all go together...."

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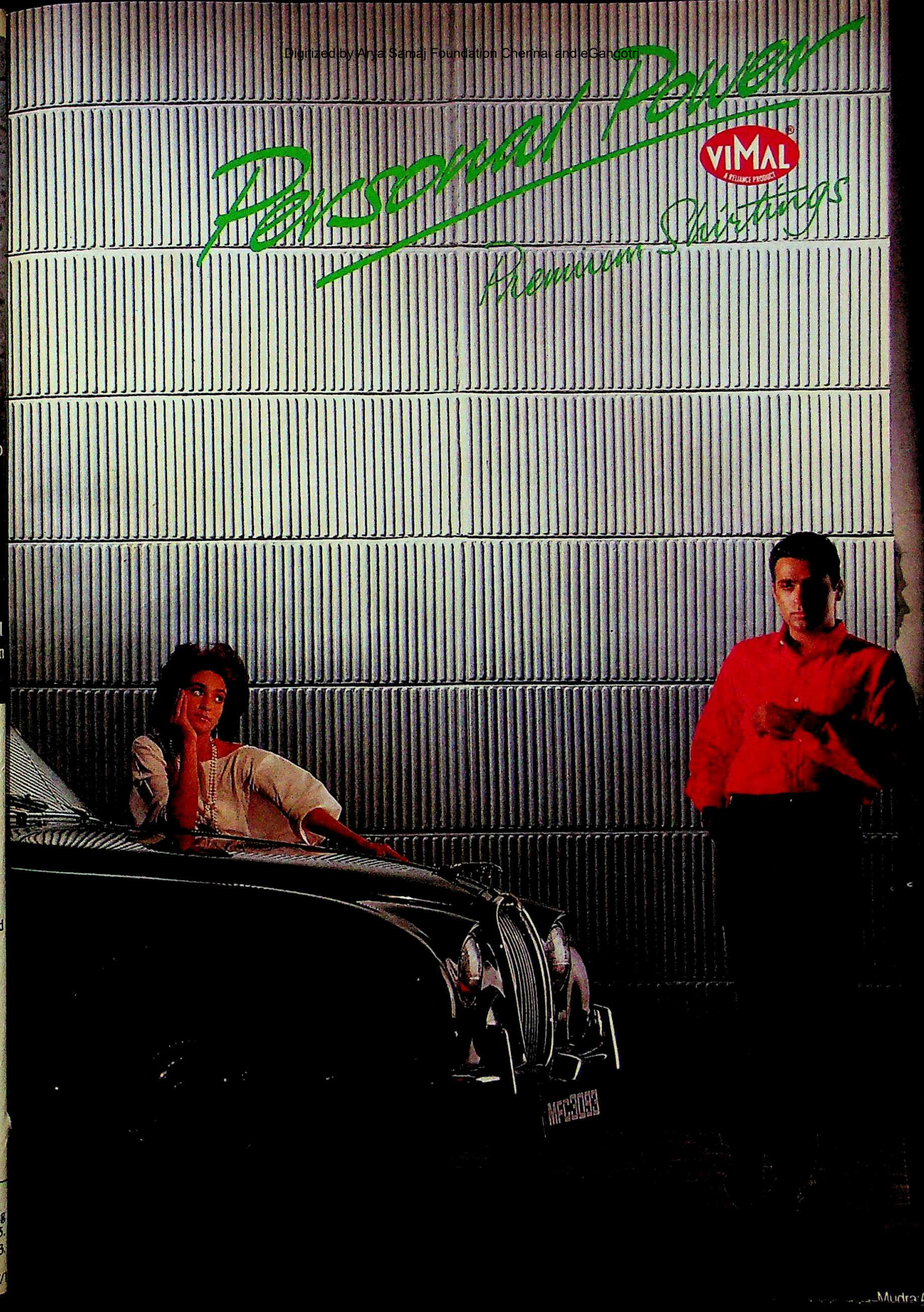

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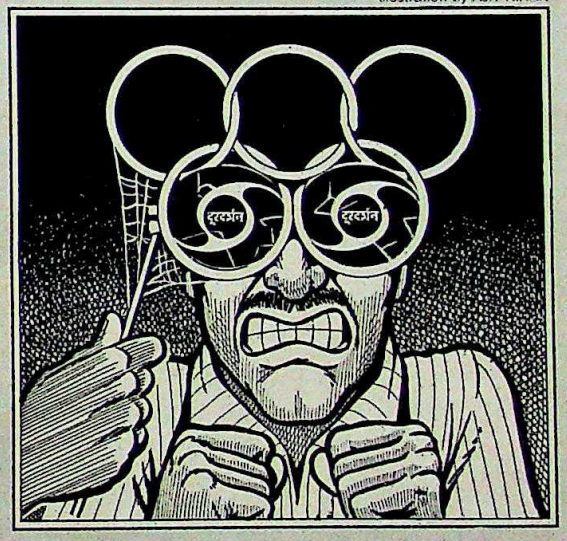
If We Can't Win, You Can't Watch

IT is a glorious affair, bridging the artificial gaps that man has created to distance himself from his intrinsic self—generation, gender, caste, religion, race. As some 9,000 athletes from 161 countries sail, skid, jump, soar, dive, slither, swim and slide their way into competitive excellence and Olympic ecstasy in Seoul, the world suddenly seems to have shrunk. The arena appears to be an innocent little abode of peace and goodwill—something like what the earth must have looked like to the first astronauts who viewed its awesome stillness from space—where the fangs of blood and violence have been removed. Where lambs and lions frolic and gambol together. How the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus must smile.

Hey *Perestroika!* Here's the Soviet Union with hundreds of competitors ready to take on Uncle Sam feinting with a socialist jab while readying to pack a capitalist round-house right kept hidden behind its back. For the first time in many years—far too many dreadful ones—the superpowers have climbed down their mushroom-clouded ivory nuke-towers and are ready to slug it out man to man, woman to woman. And what an athletic smorgasbord it is: Russian weight-lifters, Rumanian gymnasts, Indian hurdlers, Polish wrestlers, Chinese volleyballers, Tanzanian boxers, Australian cyclists. All the world's a dizzying, crazy merry-go-round.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



Here's Brazil routing the Aussies in football. There's world champion Vincenzo Maenza of Italy winning another gold medal in Graeco-Roman wrestling. And, here again, the US gold medallist Greg Louganis crashes head-on against a springboard during the diving championship and still goes on to win. Tamas Darnyi of Hungary cracks the 400 metres individual medley record in swimming. There's Zeeshan Ali, scoring over his Paraguayan rival to romp into the second round of the men's tennis singles. And here's the Indian hockey team sliding into a miserable draw against West Germany.

But how much of all this—a mere drop from the Olympiad ocean—did television audiences in India get to see? Probably very little. Doordarshan, that niggardly, unimaginative and pusillanimous propaganda pustule of the Congress Party politburo, has been starving Indian viewers of the right to see what the rest of the world is being ladled out in massive doses of satellite communications.

Every evening, Doordarshan relays about 40 lousy minutes of desultory fare from this, the grandest of all athletic moments of the year. In short snippets, the viewers, as if by supreme condescension, as if by the great and charitable magnanimity of Big Brother, are treated to the drama, the heart-breaks, the daring, the tragedies, the victories, the sacrifices on the world's own little stage in Seoul. Then it's back to the network's moronic newscasts interspersed with bouts of inanity that pass for serials. Doordarshan does not seem to realise that viewers are not interested in watching only events with Indian participation; that Indians, through television want to feel a part of what is indeed a ritual celebration of the entire human tribe in Seoul's global vilage.

Boring as the event may have been, Indian viewers were not even able to see the complete telecast of the hockey match played between West Germany and India. It may not have been a treat for sore eyes but surely it would have given home viewers a good idea of how well the Indian team had trained for this event, how many close penalties it missed, how well the newcomer Ashok Kumar played, or how pluckily Rajinder Singh Rawat defended the goal. They would probably have been able to judge for themselves, too, the glaring weaknesses in India's forward line.

Ultimately, what afflicts Doordarshan, as it afflicts most Indian institutions, is what appears to be a terminal case of parochialism—the inability to look beyond one's own little nose. It is not just in the arena of sports that this malady shows up. Other world events, too, seem of no consequence to our informationwallahs who still seem to believe—in the tradition of the splendid isolation of Brahmanism—that the world does not exist outside the pale of the Himalayas.

And so, among the most geopolitically significant events ever to rock the globe in this decade—the Gorbachev-Reagan summit and the atmosphere building up to those talks—are virtually ignored by Doordarshan. Nor did Doordarshan broadcast a decent documentary on the subject. Nearer home, Doordarshan paid but scant attention to the passing of General Zia-ul-Haq who had participated in shaping the destinies of this region for so long.

It is not as if Doordarshan has to go and make the films itself. They are available in the market. And so are Indian companies willing to sponsor them. Surely, if the Indian Government can spend crores of rupees sending advance television teams to foreign lands—and book satellite time—to show Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sipping tea with a foreign potentate, it can certainly ensure more time for the Olympics. And domestic sponsors—as has been repeatedly demonstrated in the case of endless cricket—will certainly be more than willing to defray the costs and also make Doordarshan a big profit in the bargain.

But all this needs the two elements that the country's bureaucracy is lacking: vision. And heart.

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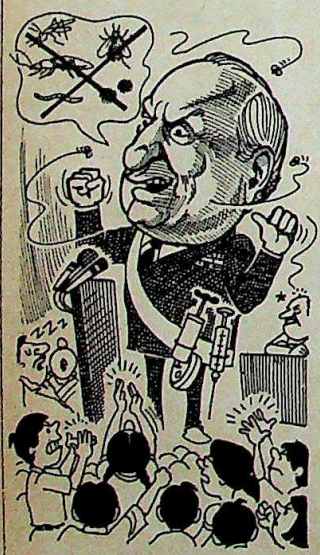
Totally Preoccupied

● He certainly seems to know what it takes to stay in a shaky chair. Perhaps only too aware that his stubborn refusal to occupy the governor's bungalow in the walled city and instead to stay put in his old residence in Akbar Road had raised many eyebrows, the newly-appointed Lt-Governor of Delhi Romesh Bhandari appears to be making up by taking his new assignment very seriously. In fact, many would say, a little too seriously.

He is so totally preoccupied with the pollution and the cholera problems of Delhi that at a founders day function of a leading public school of Delhi where he was the chief guest, he rambled on for half an hour attempting to prove that there was no cholera "epidemic" in Delhi. Little matter that he got the job in the first place precisely because of incompetent handling by the Delhi Administration of the "so-called epidemic."

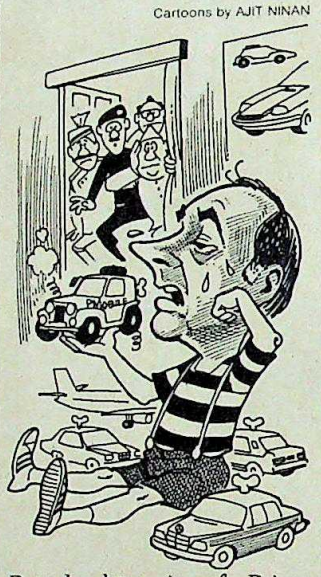


The audience, consisting of students, teachers and parents waited in vain for an inspirational word about education but Bhandari was not to be deviated from the drains of Delhi. He continued to hold forth in the same vein in spite of the audience clapping in the middle of his speech when he said, "I won't bore you any more with the problems of Delhi". Obviously, the diplomat Bhandari has turned very quickly into a hard-nosed politician who can't resist an opportunity to publicise his brave deeds.

No Jeep Jaunt

● The most memorable sight on Delhi roads—and on

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



Doordarshan—is of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi speeding along behind the wheel of his chocolate coloured, custom-built jeep. But of late, Rajiv has been more faithful to his Mercedes Benz and for very good reason. The jeep, which developed a mechanical snag, is presumably too sophisticated and valuable to be placed in the hands of local Indian mechanics. So it has been specially flown to Dubai, where custom-built vehicles are a dinar a dozen, to have the fault rectified.

But this time, the Prime Minister's Office is taking no chances. Aware of the adverse publicity attached to the prime minister's fondness for things foreign, including fancy cars, the car was sent by a special Air-India cargo flight. But with the Government insisting that there would be no free rides, the cost of freight was paid for and everything was, well, above board.

Switching Boroughs

● Rae Bareli, the eastern Uttar Pradesh parliamentary constituency represented by prime ministerial cousin Arun Nehru has suddenly started to get a whole lot of importance—from the Congress (I), of all quarters. The talk of the town is that the seat is being nurtured and pampered in the way that Amethi—Rajiv Gandhi's pocket borough—has always been.

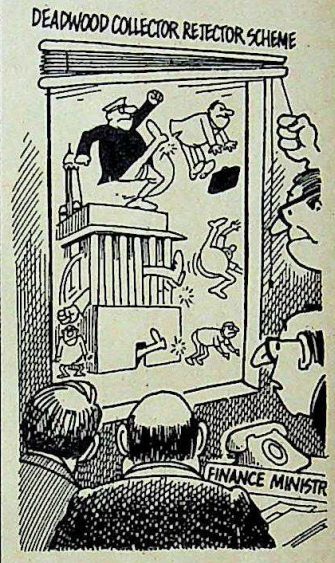
During the last fortnight, a bevy of ruling party VIPs visited the constituency to hold high-level political talks as well as to make speeches before small gatherings about better things in store for the area. They included former chief minister and now Central Communications Minister, Bir Bahadur Singh, the prime minister's political adviser, Sheila Dixit, and even high-powered AICC(I) General Secretary, Ghulam Nabi Azad. Also, the prime minister's Man Friday, Captain Satish Sharma, has been told to pay

special attention to Rae Bareli.

According to political circles, the prime minister may be getting ready to ditch Amethi and contest the next parliamentary election from Rae Bareli. According to one top adviser, a secret straw poll conducted recently showed that Rajiv stood a much better chance of winning from Rae Bareli than from Amethi.

Perpetual Scapegoats

● Funny are the ways of the Finance Ministry. In 1985 it started a cleaning drive and created a graveyard in Nagpur for erring income tax collectors. The strategy was simple. Eight posts of officers on special duty were created there and the collectors to be eased out were transferred there as punishment for corrupt ways. There were no telephones, staff or even work for them. In the face of such humiliation, they either went on leave or sought premature retirement.



About 20 collectors found guilty of various charges were eased out in the last two years. But complaints started trickling in that senior officials and politicians were misusing the facility to get rid of unobliging officers. When the clamour against this practice increased, the Finance Ministry dumped the scheme. But what takes the cake is their bureaucratic excuse for abandoning the scheme—income tax probationers in Nagpur were being spoiled in the company of "corrupt" officials. That is the Finance Ministry mandarins' way of getting out of a sticky situation. Don't blame your decision, blame the men.

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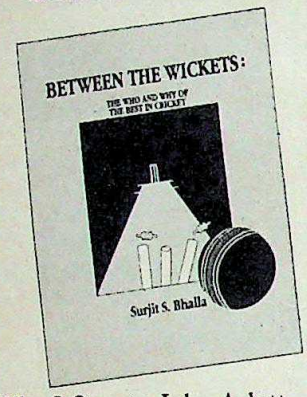

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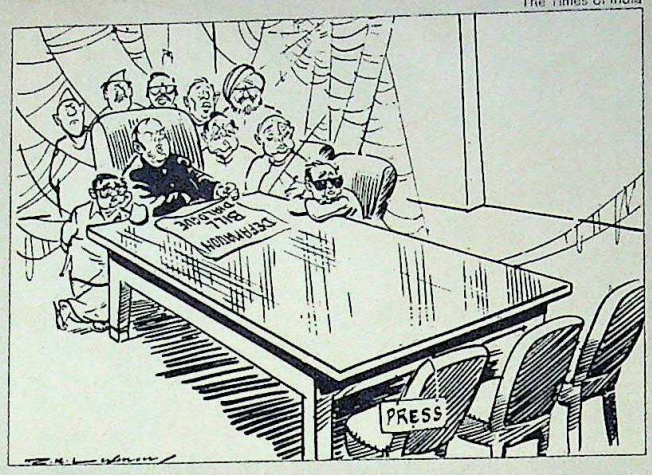

• *It (the Defamation Bill) has become a prestige issue. It will be difficult to withdraw it now.* ■ RAJIV GANDHI at a press conference in Guwahati

• *I am a journalist and an old Congressman. The (Defamation) bill is against the very grain of Congress culture and ideology.* ■ KAMALAPATHI TRIPATHI in *Sunday Mail*

• *I don't know if there are ringleaders. But we must say we are not hijackers.* ■ RAMAKRISHNA HEGDE on the Janata Party's factional differences

• *Instead of taking to guns we must plough the fields now.* ■ BEJOY HRANGKHAWL, TNV supremo, quoted in *The Telgraph*

• *I have lost faith in the Centre. If the Centre does not hold elections immediately I will have to pick up arms again.* ■ LALDENGA in *The Sunday Observer*

• *I was the first person to persuade him (Rajiv Gandhi) to enter politics though he was reluctant.* ■ A.R. ANTULAY quoted in *The Times of India*

• *If their (Left Front) slogan is Rajiv Hatao, ours is Rajiv Bachao.* ■ SUBHAS GHISING quoted in *The Telegraph*

• *If Guru Nanak had to fight Babar, we have to fight the Central Government.* ■ JIWAN SINGH UMRANANGAL, veteran Akali leader who plans to embark on a 'shanti yatra', in the *Indian Express*

• *No government in Jammu & Kashmir can succeed without the full co-operation of the Centre.* ■ FAROOQ ABDULLAH in *Sunday*

• *I have very little time to do a lot of things. So I plan for two weeks, rather than two years ahead.* ■ SHARAD PAWAR in *Business India*

• *Playing in the Olympics is another dream coming true for me. It is like playing Wimbledon for the first time.* ■ VIJAY AMRITRAJ quoted in *The Statesman*

• *I wouldn't feel awkward working with young girls. It is playing a father that makes me feel awkward because it doesn't suit my personality.* ■ DEV ANAND in *Star & Style*

• *I think Christ was a loser. No winner dies on a cross with half the world against him.* ■ VICTOR BANERJEE, who is playing the part of Jesus Christ in a British play, in *Society*

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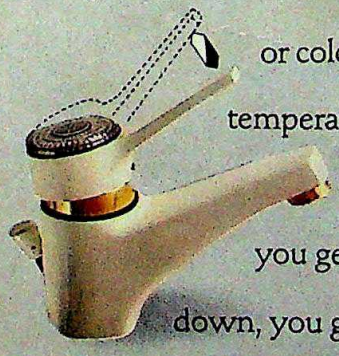

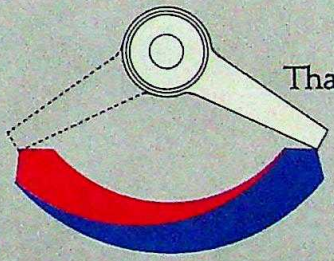

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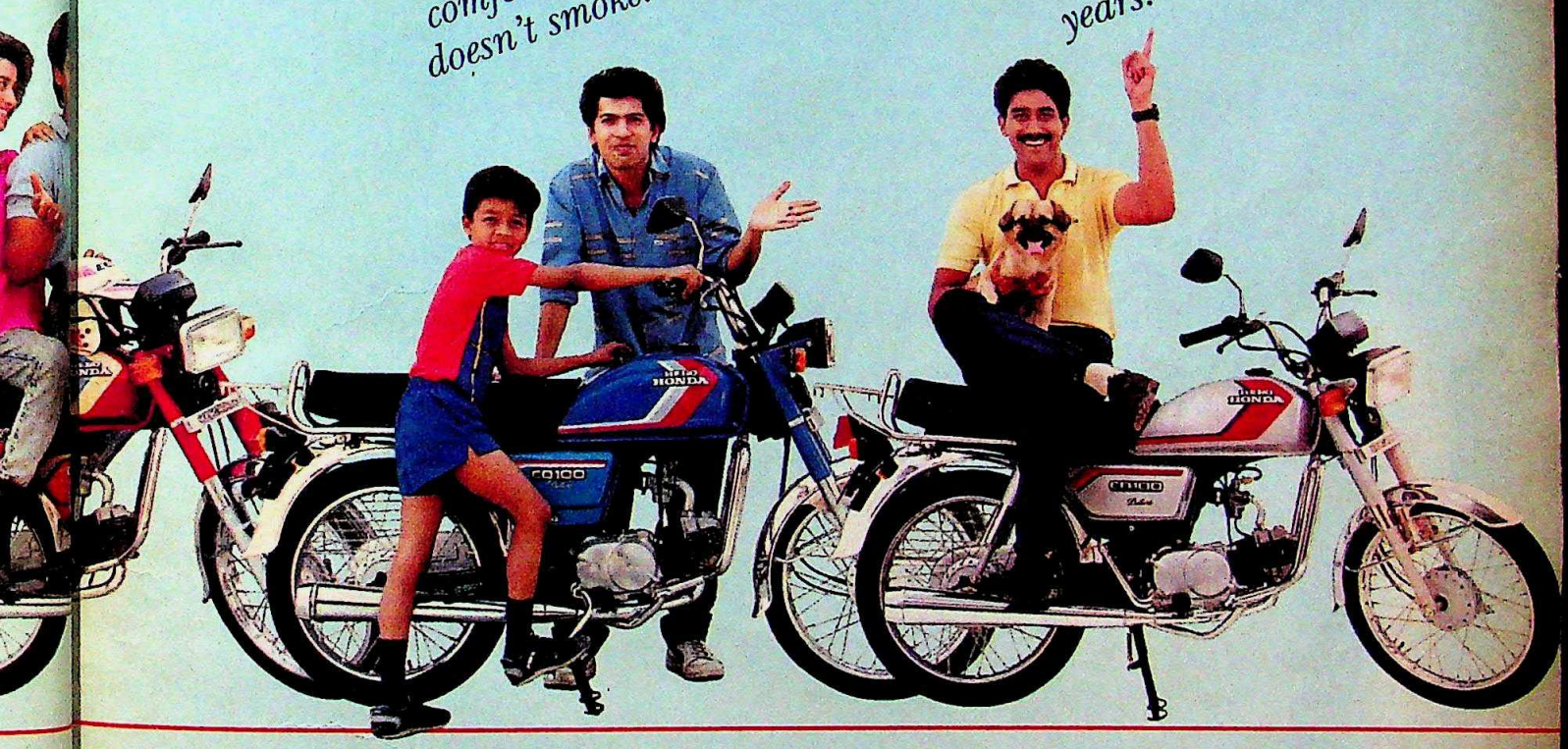

All said and done...

You've got a Good thing Going!

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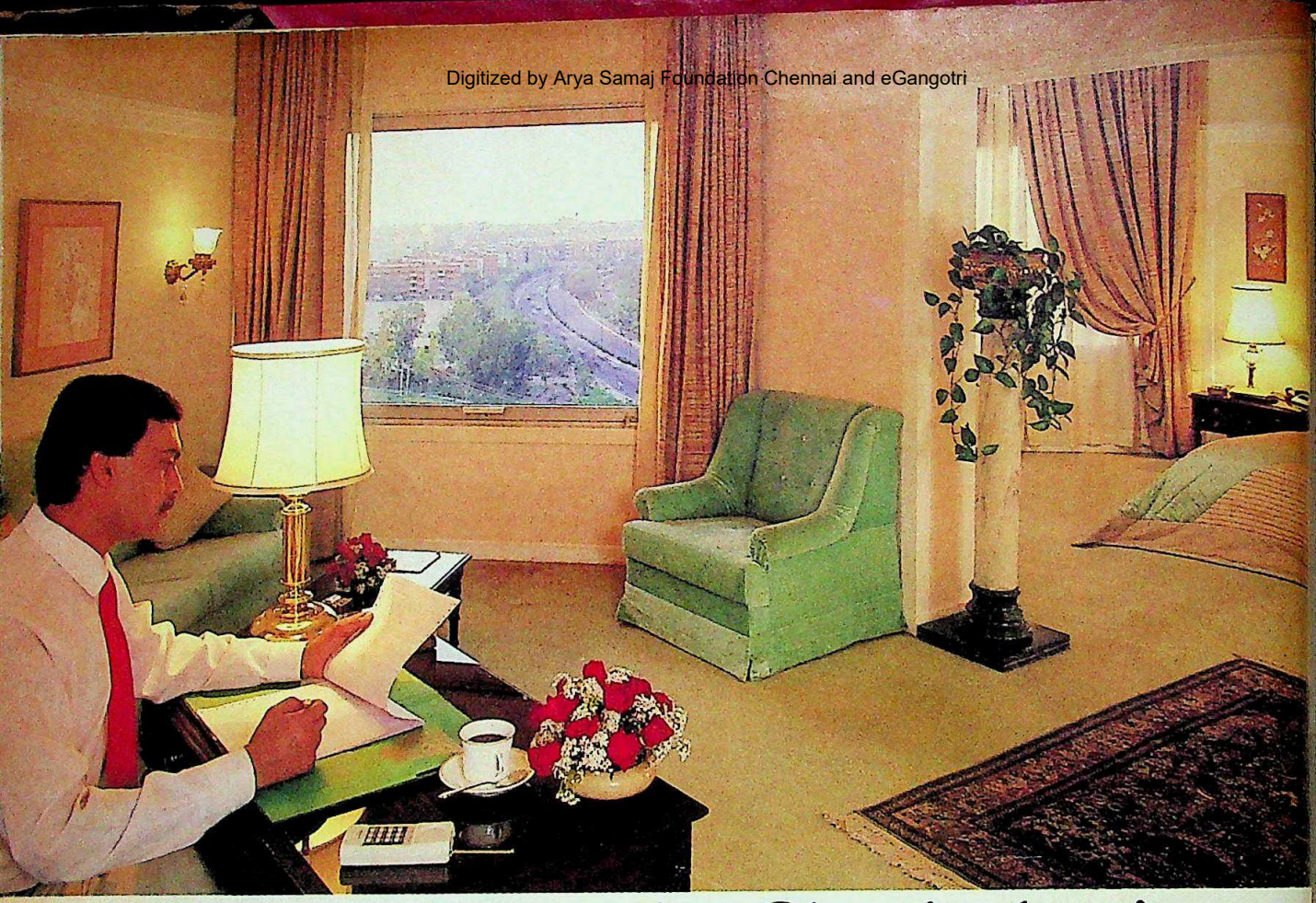

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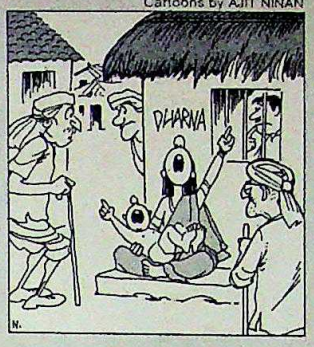
PERSISTENT PARAMOUR

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



■ It was one instance when love's labour wasn't lost. In a village in Orissa, lived Sabita and her lover Somanath who went steady for a respectable three years. Finally, Somanath got a bit bored and she a bit pregnant. The worthy man then decided that things had become too hot for him and he left, abandoning his pregnant beloved to her fate.

But Sabita was made of sterner stuff. In a series of well-planned moves, she delivered a baby boy, took him in her arms and plumped down in a dharna in front of Somanath's house.

At first Somanath pretended he didn't see anything. But a 13-month dharna is a long one, more so when fellow villagers were seeing it all too well. The Lok Adalat in Kulta village decided that enough was enough and in the presence of a gurgling baby and cheering crowds, Somanath applied the sacred vermilion and took his wife and child inside his home to begin married life.

SHORT ON STUDENTS

■ There is one thing to be said for the college—it is highly unlikely authorities will have to tackle the problems of ragging this year.

In fact, life on the first day of the new academic year in the Government College in Saunsar, Madhya Pradesh, will be so calm and well-ordered, it should make a church service seem riotous in comparison. The reason: not a single student has sought admission this year.

And in the Government College in Khilchipur, only one student has sought admission this year. Sources say there are at least 30 government colleges in the state where the number of the students is not more than 25.

These colleges have a full complement of professors whose standard complaint is underemployment. Meanwhile, the lone student in the Kilchipur college is reported to have said that at last he can stand first in class.

PUZZLED POLICE

■ Any reference to the episode is proving enough to drive the local police round the proverbial bend.

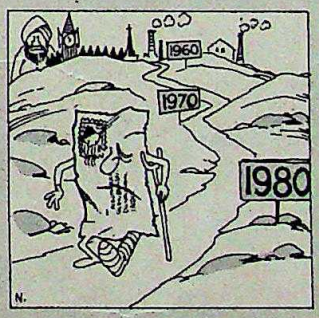
A bus belonging to a state government undertaking in Tamil Nadu was on its way from Uraiyur to Yerawadi. It hit a bullock-cart, the drivers of the two modes of transport got into an argument and the bus was left at a local police station in Ramanathapuram, pending a settlement.

The bus driver returned with his branch manager an hour later and got the shock of his life. The bus, very simply, had vanished into thin air. Following a massive hunt, it was found parked 35 km outside town. Apparently, some smart aleck had borrowed it from right under the nose of the police, taken a joy ride and got off at a convenient point.

Now, every time a bus passes the police station, passengers lean out and mock the red-faced cops.

POSTAL SAGA

■ Post haste, in this case, turned out to be something of a misnomer. In fact, when postal history is compiled, this would rank as the rarest of records. The saga began when Gurdev Singh Johal affixed stamps, address and glue on an envelope and consigned its fate to a post-box in Birmingham in England on September 10, 1963. The letter was to his father Sajjan Singh Johal in Punjab.



Showing considerable resilience and sense of purpose, the determined missive travelled through the '60s, '70s and the greater part of the '80s before it finally arrived, 25 years later, somewhat the worse for wear and tear, at Sajjan Singh's residence at village Ghurka in Jalandhar district.

Sajjan Singh's reaction, no doubt, would have been interesting to note were it not for the fact that the poor fellow had passed away in 1981.

FUTILE SEARCH

■ After the ordeal she is likely to respond to any statement about Delhi's civic sense with the single and tired word—rubbish.

A journalist in the capital was determined to deposit the garbage from her east Delhi residence exactly where it belonged—at a municipal corporation dump.

Into a plastic bag went the unappetising stuff and on her bike hopped the lady to jettison the rubbish at the dump she was sure must be somewhere around the corner.

She travelled mile after mile looking for the legal dumping ground but on the way were only the unofficial ones—overflowing with all manner of unpleasant things.

She was at last rewarded with the sight—and smell—of one in the heart of town, a distance of 10 km from her residence. Next time, the lady will probably settle for the improvised rubbish dumps.

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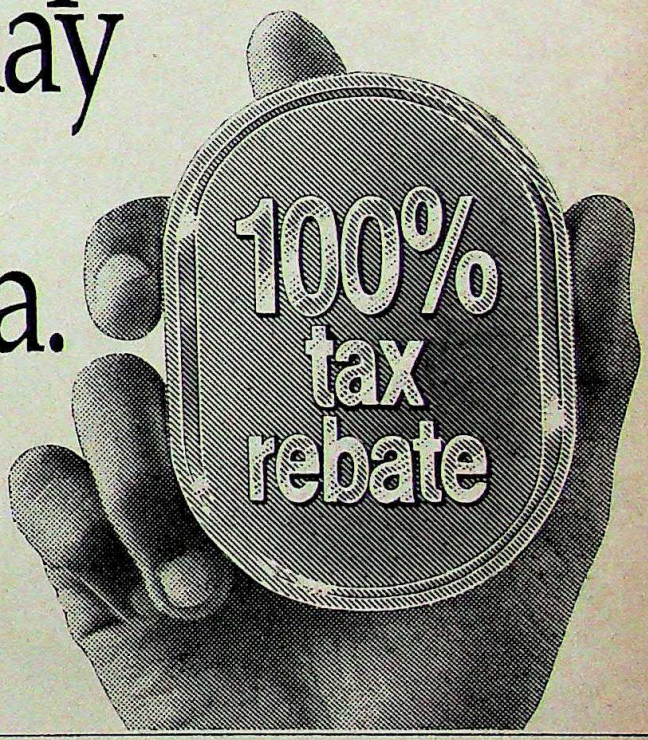

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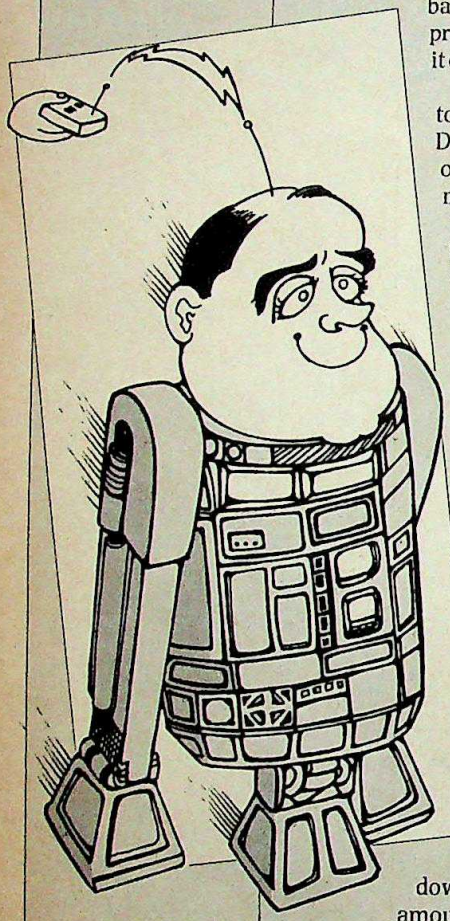
Dear Bharat,

It's been a long time since my last letter. Or maybe it just seems that way because we have a government that works faster. If truth be told, there are moments when one wonders if we have a government that works at all. Or, for that matter, whether we have a government at all.

On issues like the Defamation Bill (more of that later), it appears that this country is being run by anonymous shadows formulating policy into a dictaphone. Or perhaps, long-range walkie talkies. One can almost paraphrase the play back. "Hi tech. This is S Squared. Rustle up a defamation bill for me pronto. And no screw-ups like the last time, or the one before. I want it on my IBM when I get back from the Virgin Islands. Over and out."

That may sound a bit far-fetched to an outsider like you but not to anybody living in this country. Not any more. Take the Defamation Bill. It was sprung on an unsuspecting populace from out of the blue because of what was termed yellow journalism. The media saw red and damned it as a black bill.

Then, just when the battle was hotting up, Rajiv caved in and issued a statement in purple prose stoutly defending the freedom of the press. It must have been a bitter bill to swallow but it also illustrates the fact that he sometimes resembles a robot (R^2G^2?) being remote-controlled by a bunch of juveniles.

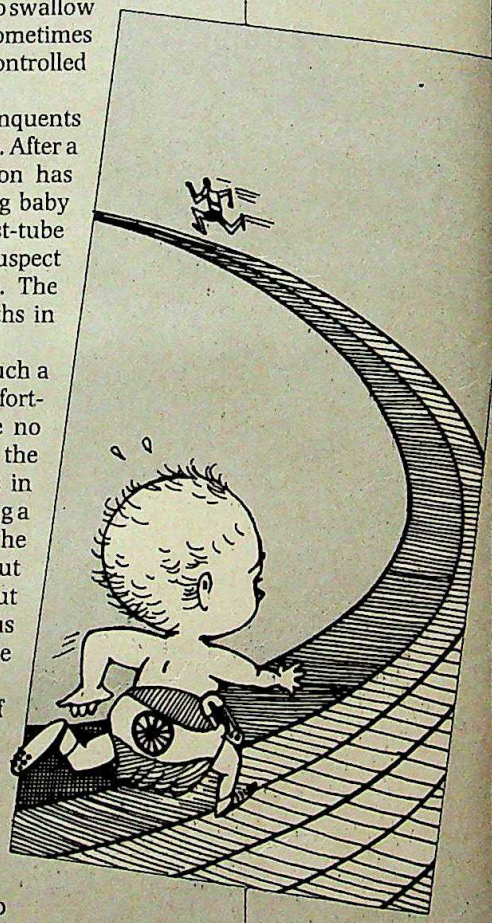


Cartoon by MANJULA PADMANBHAN

Rajiv sometimes resembles a robot being remote-controlled by a bunch of juveniles.

On the other hand, the juvenile delinquents in the Opposition seem to be growing up. After a lot of aborted attempts, the Opposition has finally given birth to a healthy-looking baby christened Unity. You could call it a test-tube baby since its parentage is slightly suspect (seven claimants at the last count). The problem is that it only has 15 months in which to reach adulthood.

But that may eventually not be such a dampener. If the main events of the fortnight are any indication, there are no dearth of babes knocking around in the woods. We have had the Marxists in West Bengal petulantly orchestrating a one-day bandh to protest against the neglect by the Centre in doling out funds. The problem is that the shut down ended up costing the state an enormous amount in lost revenue—Rs 150 crore by one estimate. That's true socialism for you.



We also have the case of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Or rather, the fact that they don't have much of one. They showed unnatural alertness in arresting Jan Morcha leader Sanjay Singh only to discover in court that they had very little evidence to go on. The result: Sanjay is out on bail and the CBI is the one that now needs bailing out.

We also had Rajiv Gandhi paying a historic visit to Punjab which was billed as a major breakthrough. But instead of any great political initiative, he returned having offered them Pepsi Cola and a paper mill instead.

But the real child's play has been India's performance at the Seoul Olympics. Not that anybody was expecting very much to begin with. But the ending has been so disgraceful that they may as well have worn diapers instead of running shorts, so dismal was their performance. In fact, the star of the team, P.T. Usha, didn't even get past the first heats. But it was, in the end, in keeping with the images of the fortnight—infants playing at being adults.

—DILIP BOBB

So dismal has been the Indians' performance at Seoul, that they may as well have worn diapers instead of shorts.

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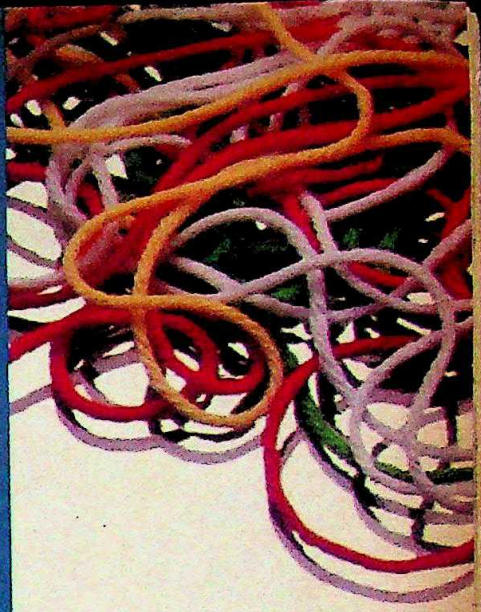

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Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

NATIONAL FRONT

One Step Forward

The seven-party National Front was formally launched last fortnight in Madras in the presence of a mammoth and receptive crowd. Despite the personality clashes in the opposition ranks, the Madras meeting was an opportunity to stage an impressive show of cohesion and unity. Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA's report.

"The National Front is like a chariot of God Aditya (Sun) drawn by seven horses. This chariot of ours will dispel the gloom and shadows that thickened through the passage of the last few decades of national history."
—Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao at the Madras rally of the National Front.

THE script was pure theatre—Rama Rao style. Even the setting was perfect: the golden sands of Marina beach in Madras. But the role was the most challenging the former film star has ever played—as a key member of the seven-party National Front aimed at providing a credible national alternative to the Congress(I).

The Madras meeting was impressive enough. At the formal launch of the front which was formed two months ago, a huge crowd sat patiently through speeches by master-of-ceremonies Rama Rao and 20 top national opposition leaders, including three non-Congress(I) chief ministers. Speakers from the Jan Morcha, Janata Party, Congress(S), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Telugu Desam, DMK, and the Lok Dal(B) used the occasion to try and project a cohesive unity of ideology and action. Said the National Front's Convenor Vishwanath Pratap Singh: "The front is functioning smoothly and effectively."

Singh had reason to feel elated. In view of the failure of earlier merger attempts, the formation of the front had bolstered the opposition's credibility. For the first time, the attempt by front leaders to project themselves as a credible alternative to the Congress(I) carried some element of conviction. Their arguement was that if coalitions can work effectively in Kerala and West Bengal, it can perform at the centre as well. Moreover, for the Front partners, it will now be easier to make seat adjustments with other non-

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A giant poster depicting Rama Rao as the hope of the nation

Front Opposition parties.

Moreover, constant tirade against opposition unity by a few Janata leaders in Delhi could not dampen the high spirits of regional leaders who were determined to make the rally a success. But with the intra-party problems and personality clashes still fresh in the public mind, it was obvious that the National Front chariot was being pulled in different directions by the "seven horses". Despite a show of unity at Madras, the various parties that constitute the front were adopting contradictory postures on vital issues. The divisions within the alliance started to show up barely a day before its formal inauguration.

It began with Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal's assertion that only Hindi could be the national language. His statement caused embarrassment for the hosts—the DMK—who found it extremely difficult to counter the anti-Devi Lal demonstration staged by a faction of the AIADMK in Madras. The DMK dissociated itself from Devi Lal's stand.

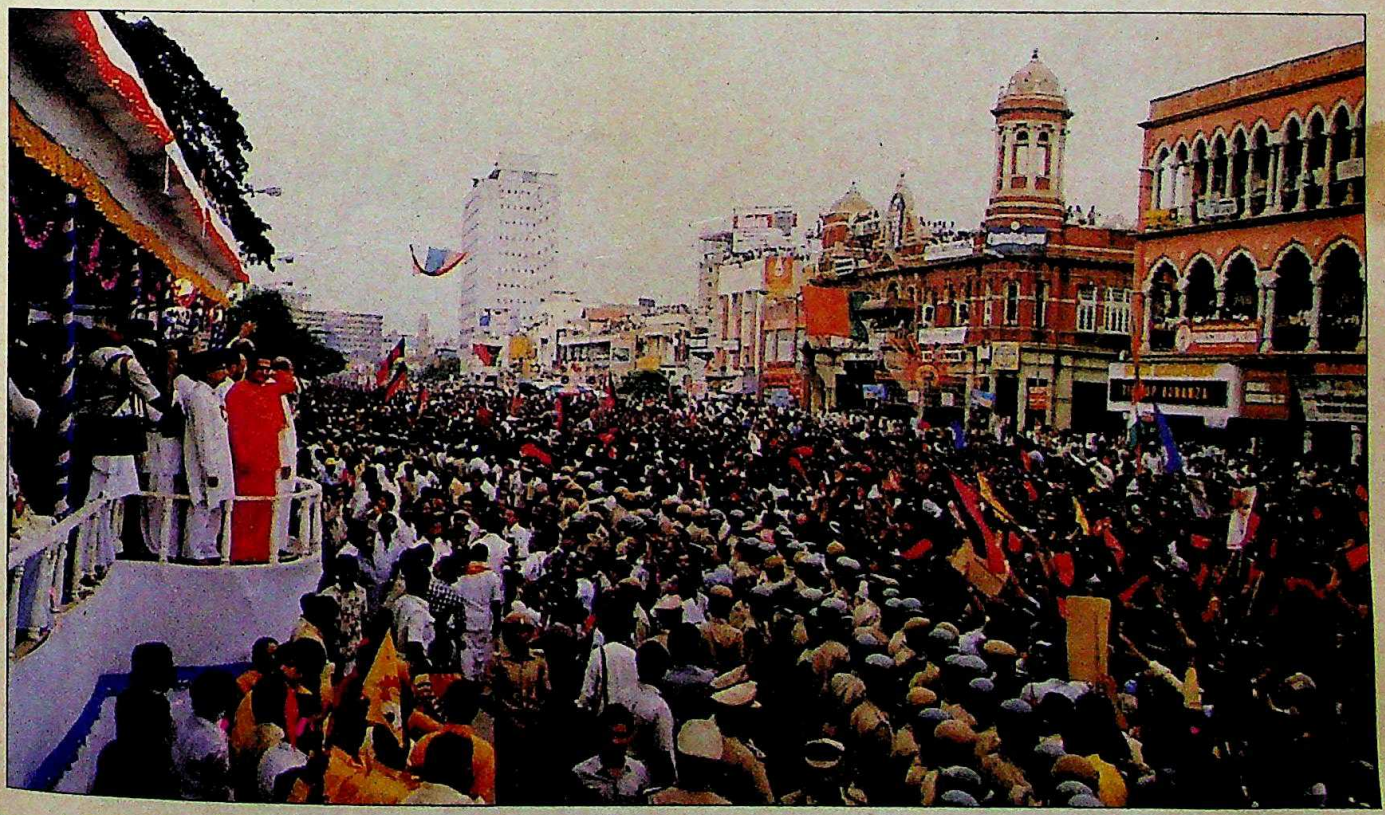
Even more embarrassing for the front was the open verbal war between Devi Lal and Bahuguna. In an informal chat with the press, Devi Lal lashed out at his party's chief by terming him as a leader without a base, who was "not a hero but a zero". And he even went on to challenge Bahuguna. Thundered Devi Lal with his typical rustic bluntness: "Let him start his own party and see. He will be entirely exposed." Then, Devi Lal was forced to soften his line on the language issue. After persuasion by Singh and others, Devi Lal dropped his original plan of speaking in Hindi at the rally. Instead, he delivered his speech in English.

DESPITE THE INTERNAL PRESSURES, THE REGIONAL PARTIES SUCCEEDED IN MAKING THE MADRAS RALLY A MASSIVE SUCCESS.

Meanwhile, the two regional parties, Rama Rao's Telugu Desam and the Karunanidhi-led DMK, were involved in a messy struggle to upstage each other. A day before the public meeting, red-shirted and black-trousered DMK supporters fought a pitched battle with Telugu Desam workers in front of the DMK's office. The scene was repeated the next day when the two sides fought to occupy key positions at the venue of the launch.

The National Front suffered another set-back when the local Janata unit, led by its President Era Sezhian, boycotted the meeting altogether. Ironically, the Janata was represented at the rally by leaders like Ajit Singh and Subramanium Swamy who are widely perceived as being anti-opposition unity. At the same time, leaders like former Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde and Janata leader Madhu Dandavate who are considered the main pillars of the unity move, were

The Madras rally: show of strength



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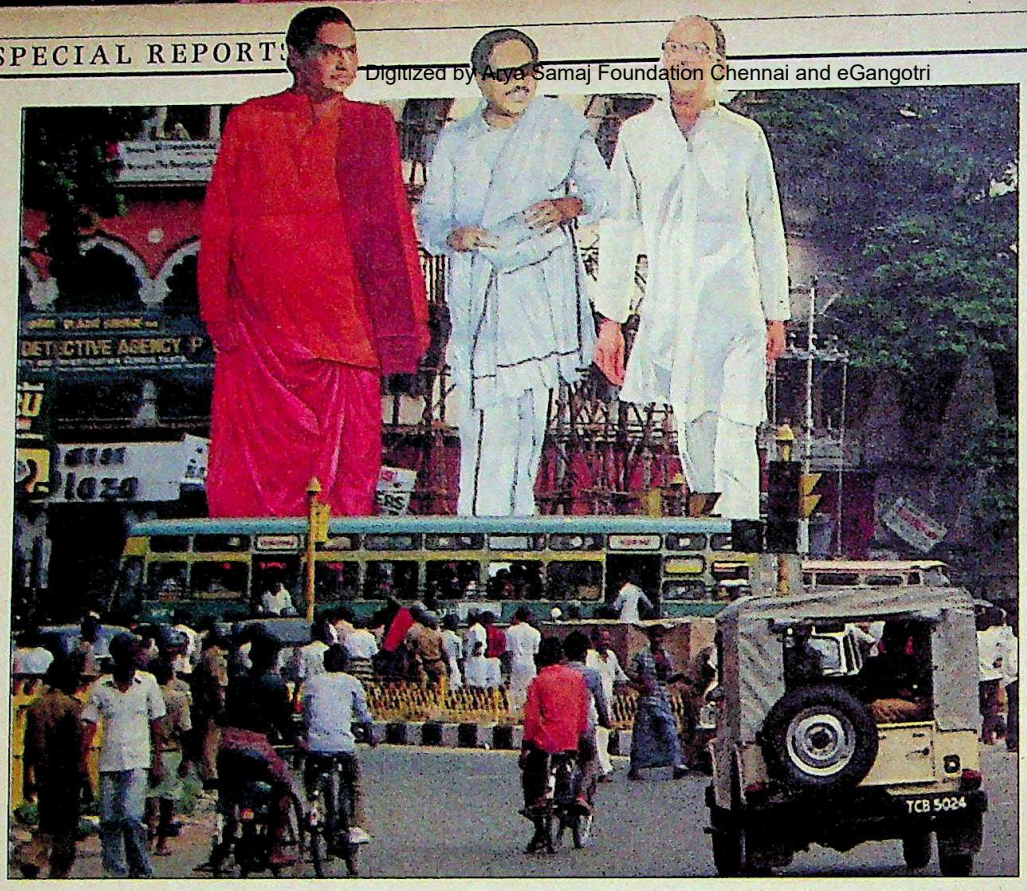

Cut-outs of front leaders in Madras

conspicuous by their absence, ostensibly due to their preoccupation with factional feuds. The DMK, as hosts, had sent invitations to the 100-odd MPs of the seven parties as well as to leaders in the state assemblies. Hardly half of those invited turned up for the meeting, however. Finally, the euphoria generated by the successful launch of the front was dampened by the open confrontation between the Hegde and Chandra Shekhar factions of the Janata Party back in New Delhi which almost threatened to split the party.

IT was eventually resolved when V.P. Singh intervened. At a stormy meeting of the Janata Parliamentary Board, Singh was chosen as the chairman of the steering committee which would finalise the formalities for the merger of the four parties. But the incidents only served to highlight the fact that the launching of the front is only the first step along a long and tortuous road to its national acceptance.

That was made all the more obvious by the tone of the deliberations at the various meetings held in Madras. Though the presidium, comprising the heads of all seven parties and opposition chief ministers, did endorse the reports and recommendations of most committees, it postponed the approval of the crucial action programme prepared by a committee headed by Bahuguna. Said Arif Mohammed Khan, one of the secretaries of the front: "Bahugunaji's draft has been accepted in principle but it needs to be discussed at the lower level at each party's forum."

THE LAUNCH OF THE FRONT WAS A MASSIVE IMAGE-BOOSTER FOR JAN MORCHA LEADER V.P. SINGH.

According to front sources, Bahuguna's 14-page draft was opposed by the Telugu Desam and the Devi Lal group. Said a senior Telugu Desam leader: "Bahuguna wanted to play politics by imposing a draft which is nothing but a collection of old ideas and a summary of the front's original programme." Bahuguna's draft had suggested that the front commit itself to the implementation of a time-bound programme on certain socio-economic issues. It also recommended that "leaders of the front, especially those holding offices in the (state) governments and organisations, should make public declarations of their total assets and thereafter promise revised declarations of the same every two years till they retire from public life". It was obvious that the proposal was aimed at his key opponents in the front like Devi Lal and Rama Rao.

In that context, the front scored a major success by adopting a set of 10 guidelines which bars its leaders and office-bearers from making public criticism of each other. The guidelines make it mandatory for each constituent to raise its problems within the front forum and cooperate with the state governments. As a result, the Janata is now expected to extend total support to the Rama Rao Government in Andhra Pradesh and Devi Lal in Haryana.

But that was clearly offset by the cool response from other non-front opposition parties. The Andhra unit of the CPI termed the front as pro-capitalist and pro-rich and decided to launch an agitation against the Rama Rao Government. The BJP, on its part, maintained a pregnant silence on the launch.

Despite the problems, the Madras rally gave enough cause for concern to the ruling party at the Centre. By organising such a huge rally, the DMK had shown its mobilising power to the Congress(I) which had been able to collect hardly a few thousand people for its AICC(I) session at Maraimalainagar in April this year. More important, the launch of the front was a massive image-booster for V.P. Singh who is being projected in the south as the future prime minister of the country.

Moreover, the Madras meet brought the northern, eastern and southern regional parties together for the first time on one platform and under a common flag. Said Dinesh Goswamy, an articulate AGP member of Parliament and one of the secretaries of the front: "The front can really ensure that federalism works in this country. We can have an arrangement by which regional parties can be part of the national mainstream and take part in national politics. It will ensure stronger nationalism and unity."

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That, however, is still a long way off. Though the seven parties have succeeded in narrowing down ideological disparities on various issues, their final agenda is unlikely to be radically different from the Congress(I)'s. Ultimately, what the front is likely to produce as their electoral agenda is a mixed economy with the public sector playing a major role, continuation of the existing caste-based reservation policy, an unclear language policy, and a loosely-defined idea of Centre-state relations. The only major difference will be in their demand for a coalition government to run the country.

Last fortnight's launch has set in motion a process that could snowball into something tangible. V.P. Singh and his supporters like Devi Lal are hoping that the front will eventually become the focal point of all-round opposition unity. In Madras it was decided that at least two massive rallies should take place every month in various parts of the country where front leaders would address the public. Said Devi Lal: "The caravan has started. Those who fail to join will fall on the wayside." But to use Rama Rao's immortal words, it is still a caravan pulled by seven indisciplined horses.

DMK

Piggy Backing

AT the historic Marina beach in Madras, giant cut-outs of Jan Morcha leader V.P. Singh, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao and DMK President M. Karunanidhi loomed large over a mammoth crowd. The occasion was the formal launch of the seven-party National Front.

The high point of the political spectacle, however, was not the newly-launched front but the DMK which had hosted the show. Contrary to expectations, it was not the regional party that had tagged on to the National Front but the latter that had ended up taking a ride on the DMK bandwagon. "It was our organisational ability that was responsible for the success of the launch," boasted a senior DMK leader. "We have committed grassroots cadres and are perhaps the only democratic party in the country."

There was reason for the resounding success of the DMK and its leader, M. Karunanidhi. In Tamil Nadu, nothing sells like a personality-cult. Leaders and charisma count far more than ideologies and policies. That maxim proved to be only too true at the launch of the front. While the cardboard cut-outs of party leaders dominated the proceedings, the much-trumpeted issue of corruption and the Defamation Bill took a back seat. Affirmed S. Kothandam, an agriculturist from Vellore in north Arcot district who was part of the gathering: "It is the DMK and Karunanidhi who matter to me and many others; not the National Front with its rhetoric."

Ideologically-speaking, the DMK does not entirely mesh with the opposition front. For one thing, it has been fiercely fighting against the imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states and has repeatedly demanded that English be made the link language. The

Karunanidhi (centre): big boost

National Front's 71-point programme talks only about implementing Jawaharlal Nehru's assurance that Hindi would not be imposed.

For another, Karunanidhi has been lobbying for India's providing help to the Sri Lankan Tamils in their effort to form a separate Tamil Eelam. The National Front, on its part, is not willing to go beyond seeking a negotiated settlement to the Tamil problem. The DMK leader, however, conceded: "We have to look at things from a national perspective and cannot be merely content with our regional outlook. There are bound to be differences in a democracy but we shouldn't be deterred by them from achieving common objectives."

But the common man in Tamil Nadu views the issue somewhat differently. "Here we see politics only as involving our leader Kalaignar (Karunanidhi) and that lady Jayalalitha," commented P. Nesamma, a daily-wage labourer from Wandiwash in north Arcot. "National issues like corruption do not make any sense to us. After all, in politics who does not make money?" he asked pragmatically.

The array of opposition leaders who had assembled in Madras were quick to sense the mood of the people. To the thunderous applause of the crowds, they hailed Karunanidhi as the next chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

The opposition launch also served to enhance Karunanidhi's electoral chances in the state. It gave him an opportunity to woo the Vanniya community, which dominates eight northern districts of the state. The Vanniyas have been agitating for a 20-per cent reservation in education and employment and had threatened to not allow Karunanidhi, or any other political leader, to enter areas in which they held sway.

At the Madras launch, however, Karunanidhi seems to have scored some vital points. Kothandapani Pitchai of Madurantakam who was present at Marina beach that day could not have put it more tellingly: "Our claps and our votes are only for Kalaignar."

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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DEFAMATION BILL

Conceding Defeat

After weeks of the most dangerous kind of brinkmanship the Government finally announced that it would withdraw the infamous Defamation Bill which the press had unanimously condemned as an instrument for bludgeoning free speech. Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA provides a behind-the-scenes account of the pressures on the prime minister that ultimately led to the government's capitulation.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

IT is a dish that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is increasingly—if inadvertently—getting addicted to. But last fortnight's must have been the humblest pie he has had to taste in his 44 months in office. Barely few days after Rajiv announced, during a visit to Assam, that he was "totally convinced" his controversial Defamation Bill was the right recipe for the country, he meekly caved in and announced its withdrawal.

Rajiv had little choice. Faced with a show of unprecedented defiance from the media, and growing opposition from his own partymen, anything short of withdrawal was clearly going to damage the ruling party's sagging fortunes at a time when the next general elections are looming large on the political horizon.

Even so, Rajiv's sudden capitulation did come as something of an anticlimax to an issue that threatened to dominate the pre-election scenario. Equally surprising was the manner in which the bill was withdrawn. Instead of the official spokesman making an announcement on behalf of the Government, as is normal practice, the statement—which was issued in the form of a press release—came from the prime minister himself.

Senior government officials and cabinet ministers responsible for monitoring the reaction to the bill were also taken by surprise. The entire cabinet was summoned at short notice to 7 Race Course Road at 3 p.m. on September 22, a day before Rajiv was scheduled to leave for Bhutan. No advance agenda was given. They were merely told that an emergency meeting of the Cabinet was being summoned.

When Rajiv arrived, looking grim but composed, he lost no time in informing his cabinet colleagues that he had called them to discuss the possible withdrawal of the bill. Though the meeting lasted two hours, it was evident, as one minister confided later, that the decision had already been taken and they were only going through the motions. The only real issue was how the announcement was to be made. The general consensus was that Rajiv

"WE WILL LIKE THEM (THE PRESS) TO READ THE BILL... WE ARE TOTALLY CONVINCED THAT THE BILL IS NEEDED. I AM MYSELF CONVINCED THAT WE ARE PROCEEDING ON THE RIGHT LINE."

RAJIV GANDHI ON SEPTEMBER 4, 1988, NEW DELHI

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himself should issue the statement.

Shortly after, Rajiv signed the press release which laid heavy emphasis on the Government's commitment to a free press. "A free press is an integral part of the inner strength and dynamism of our democracy. Without a free press there can be no democracy. The imperishable values of our freedom struggle have gone into the making of the press in India. We uphold this legacy," said the statement.

With that, a month-long battle ended in an undoubted victory for the media which, despite the Government's best efforts, had stubbornly and manfully stuck to the stand that they would settle for nothing short of total withdrawal of the bill. Said H.K. Dua, editor of *The Hindustan Times*, a normally pro-establishment paper that had also adopted a tough line against the bill: "The Government must have realised the folly of making an attempt to steal through Parliament a piece of legislation that sought to deny 80 crore people of this land the right of expression, forgetting that the laws not accepted by the people are not worth the paper they are written on."

More crucial than victory for the media was the defeat for the ruling party. Never before in India's parliamentary history has a legislation passed by the Lok Sabha been withdrawn under public pressure. Undoubtedly a vital factor influencing Rajiv's decision was the kind of across-the-board support the anti-bill agitation had acquired.

Apart from media organisations all over the country, groups of advocates, students, teachers and trade unions joined in the protest. Spontaneous demonstrations took place almost throughout the land. Over 100 public meetings addressed by leading journalists were held in districts and small towns. The opposition parties gave a call for a week-long agitation against the bill. They, in fact, used the bill to bolster their argument that the Congress(I) rule was corrupt and that it was trying to muzzle the press to pre-empt publicising of further scandals.

Faced with that kind of resistance, the Congress(I) was unable to muster a credible defence. At least two senior cabinet ministers had to face the humiliation of abandoning press conferences in the face of the strategy adopted by the media. At the start of the press conference, the seniormost journalist present would ask the minister whether he supported the bill. When the ministers tried to avoid the question, all the journalists present would walk out. Other ministers hastily cancelled scheduled press conferences, rather than face a similar embarrassment.

Other elements of the Government's strategy failed as well. Meetings were arranged with senior journalists known to be pro-Rajiv but most of them advised him against pushing the bill through. Rajiv's media managers then tried to create a rift among journalists by interviewing some of them on national TV, where it came across that many weren't averse to a dialogue with the Government on the bill. They were also manipulated into admitting that there were elements in the media that were going too far and needed to be curbed. The obvious reference was to the *Indian Express* which, under Editor Arun Shourie, has been waging a remorseless war against Rajiv and his controversial cronies.

The Government then chose to activate its ministers and party leaders to launch a campaign in favour of the bill. A list of 36 invitees, including a few prominent editors, was prepared by Information & Broadcasting Minister H.K.L. Bhagat. On September 6, Bhagat wrote a personal letter inviting all of them for a dialogue with the seven-member committee of ministers constituted by the prime minister. But to the Government's surprise—barring representatives of three organisations known more for vocations other than journalism—none responded to Bhagat's invitation. All bluntly told Bhagat that they would not meet the ministers until the bill was totally withdrawn.

Even so, the committee went through the formality of a dialogue with the "media", despite the fact that all three media organisations which it met are widely known to be

PRESS WILL HAVE TO CONVINCE ME THAT THE BILL IS RUBBISH. PRESS SHOULD GIVE SUGGESTIONS.... THERE ARE SOME PROBLEMS IN THE BILL. BUT YOU (THE PRESS) ARE NOT WILLING TO TALK TO US."

RAJIV GANDHI ON SEPTEMBER 15, 1988, GUWAHATI

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pro-establishment. One of them, the All-India Newspapers Editors' Conference, is headed by Vishwabandhu Gupta, a Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member.

But what finally sealed the fate of the ill-advised bill was the growing opposition to it within the Congress(I) itself. Rajiv had earlier asked Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the glib-tongued Sheila Dixit, to elicit the opinion of senior party leaders and activate them into stronger support for the bill. Early last month, Dixit invited 20 odd party MPs representing various lobbies for tea at her house. To her surprise, barring the younger MPs, none of the seniors ones, including a few former AICC(I) and PCC(I) office-bearers, expressed support for the bill. She faithfully reported their reaction to the prime minister. But the crunch came a week later when senior Congress(I) MPs from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat initiated a move to collect signatures on a memorandum to be submitted to Rajiv, requesting him to withdraw the bill. The PMO saw in the move a possible revolt against Rajiv's leadership.

Faced with that situation, Rajiv and his advisers desperately tried evolving a face-saving formula. Shortly after his return from Punjab on September 21, Rajiv summoned the ministerial group for a discussion at his residence on Race Course Road at 9.30 p.m. With External Affairs Minister Narasimha Rao and Home Minister Buta Singh out of the country, only Bhagat and Human Resources Minister P. Shiv Shanker showed up. Others present included Minister of State for Home, P. Chidambaram, Sheila Dixit, Information & Broadcasting Secretary Gopi Arora, Information Adviser Suman Dubey and G. Parthasarathy, joint secretary in the PMO. The meeting lasted over three hours but ended without any decision being taken. The next morning, the same group met again. This time, six different alternatives were discussed:

- ► Unconditional withdrawal of the bill;
- ► Pushing it through without any changes;
- ► Adopt certain changes suggested by a few media organisations;
- ► Refer the bill to the select committee;
- ► Refer it to a group of jurists,
- ► Appoint a joint panel of judges and journalists to look at the defamation laws including the bill.

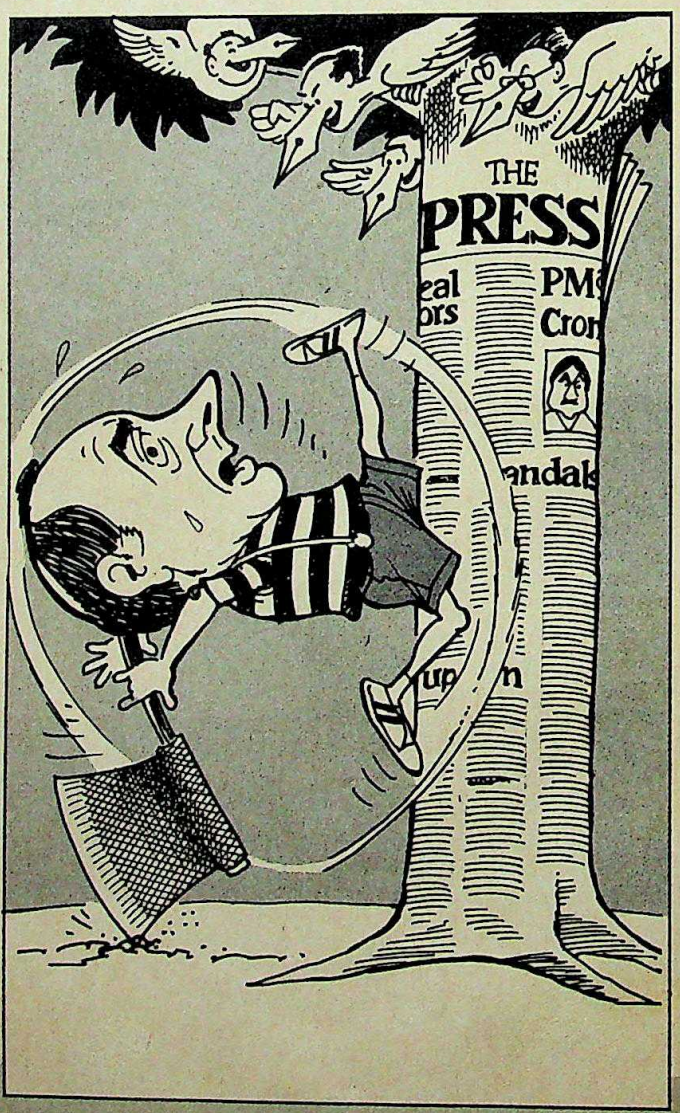
None of those present ventured to give an opinion on which possible course was desirable. But Rajiv, perhaps sensing the mood, quickly made up his mind. The Cabinet was summoned and within a few hours, the bill was confined to dubious history.

The ultimate irony lay in the frantic efforts by senior ministers and Congress (I) politicians to claim credit for the move in subtle leaks to the same press they had just attempted to muzzle. Some newspapers even carried a front-page planted item stating that Amitabh Bachchan had advised Rajiv to withdraw the bill.

For Rajiv the climb-down comes at the worst possible moment. With his popularity on the wane, and the Opposition finally showing signs of discarding their differences amid last fortnight's launch of the seven-party National Front, any political set-back now will have an exaggerated impact.

In fact, emboldened by the victory, the media as well as the Opposition are now preparing to fight another battle aimed at gaining greater access to government information. A plan of action, already under the consideration of media organisations, intends to demand withdrawal of the Official Secrets Act which debars journalists access to even routine information. With the Defamation Bill being widely viewed as a clumsy attempt to protect those close to the prime minister, any tough stand on modifications to the Official Secrets Act will obviously be seen in the same light.

As it is, the urgency with which the bill was introduced, and the equally abrupt manner in which it was withdrawn, has only reinforced a growing belief—that Rajiv is a prisoner of apolitical advisers who are forcing him to take ad hoc decisions to suit their own limited interests rather than those of the country.



WITHOUT A FREE PRESS, THERE CAN BE NO DEMOCRACY... WE UPHOLD THIS LEGACY...WE HAVE THEREFORE DECIDED NOT TO MAKE THE DEFAMATION BILL, 1988 INTO LAW."

RAJIV GANDHI ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1988, NEW DELHI

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A Happy Ending

IT was a heady moment for the Indian press on September 5. The protest march against the Defamation Bill from the eternal flame at New Delhi's India Gate to the Boat Club attracted a veritable roster of the best-known names in Indian journalism.

Proprietors, led by the spunky Ramnath Goenka of the *Indian Express*, editors, columnists, reporters and sub-editors trudged the four-kilometre route under a merciless sun. A jarring note was provided by professional slogan-shouters giving a personal anti-Rajiv Gandhi twist to the march, but it was quickly forgotten in the joy of seeing everyone—or almost everyone—participate. A former colleague enthused: "It's wonderful how proprietors have got lost in the crowd." The *Statesman* wrote a lyrical account the next day, the author regrettably remaining anonymous.

The rare unanimity symbolised by the march shouldn't have come as a surprise. The bill, introduced and passed in the Lok Sabha, had been greeted with a chorus of protest by newspapers as each sought to prove in its own way how the bill, introduced under the guise of protecting individual rights, would demolish a free press.

Rajiv Gandhi, with his penchant for shooting himself in the foot, had announced the previous day that he was deferring the introduction of the bill in the Rajya Sabha, while justifying it and gratuitously suggesting that the press hadn't studied it. The march and the protests went on. The National Coordination Committee (NCC), decided that it wouldn't talk to the ministerial committee appointed by the prime minister until the bill was withdrawn.

Both the Government and the press then proceeded to Phase II of the exercise. The NCC was subjected to some strain as efforts were made to club the opposition to the bill with demands regarding the Bachawat Committee's tentative wage revisions for journalists. The move was widely interpreted in the press as one that would help the Government pit journalists against proprietors, traditionally loath to paying more money. (Why the Government should set wages for journalists in a country with a free press is a curious, but different, matter.)

The protests and meetings continued around the country. Danger bells began ringing when two journalists, Editor Arun Shourie of the *Indian Express* and columnist Sundar Rajan, appeared on a platform with opposition leaders to decry the bill. There are inherent dangers in fighting a professional battle on partisan shoulders: it will immediately divide the heterogeneous press and make the cause less appealing to the general public.

> "Any policing system must be devised by the press itself, and if the defamation law needs tightening, it must be done after full consultation with various press organisations."

The press rightly fielded the big legal guns to buttress its case which, in essence, is a simple one: the draconian nature of the bill will destroy the freedom of the press in India. Among the most lucid expositions was one by H.R. Khanna, a former judge of the Supreme Court, in *The Hindustan Times*.

But the Government was inundating radio and television broadcasts with soothing words. The catchword was "dialogue". The attempt obviously was to paint the press as unreasonable. What's wrong with talking? The journalists' stand was that the talking phase should have preceded the bill's introduction and a dialogue would be welcome once the bill was withdrawn.

The Government had a victory of sorts by getting the pro-establishment All India Newspaper Editors' Conference (AINEC) to talk to the committee.

The prime minister and his articulate aide, Shiela Dixit, made it clear that the bill had been more than a year in the making, in itself a sad comment on the wisdom of the Government. Rajiv Gandhi seemed so obsessed with the accusations made against him and his friends that he was loath to let the bill go, despite the protests and expert legal opinion that the freedom of the press would be sacrificed.

As *The Times of India* revealed, suggestions that a meeting of the NCC be synchronised with the withdrawal of the bill were spurned by the Government. It is nobody's case that reform is not needed in the press, but any policing system must be devised by the press itself, and if the defamation law needs tightening, it must be done after full consultation with representative organisations of the press. The Government would have a more convincing case if it first bestirred itself to reform a legal process which is the laughing-stock of the world.

Then came Phase III of the war. The mood in the press was one of unease because the Government's motives remained suspect and there was justified wariness about its future moves. But apart from the expected defection of such organisations as AINEC, press unity held.

How is it, a reporter of *Dinman* asked me, that the press was almost universally defiant when it caved in during Mrs Gandhi's Emergency? That was a different ball game. Stringent press censorship came in tandem with the proclamation of the Emergency. A special kind of censorship was now sought to be imposed without the Emergency. If an Emergency had been proclaimed, the press would, regrettably, have presented a different picture.

But this story has a happy ending. The bill has mercifully been withdrawn—not a day too soon.

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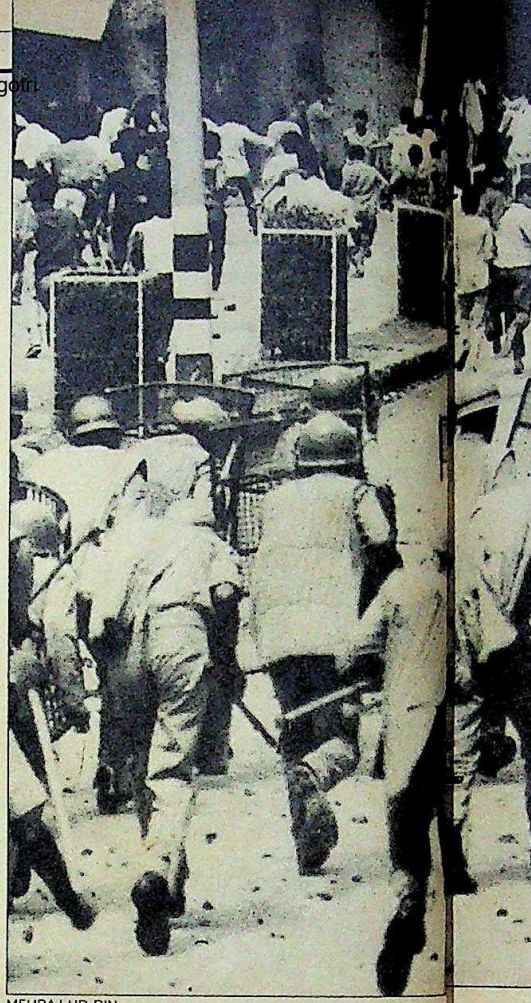
JAMMU & KASHMIR

A Summer of Torment

More than 21 months since the National Conference-Congress-I alliance came to power in the state, Kashmir seems ready to burst at the seams. Inefficiency, corruption, religious fundamentalism, and escalating violence stalk the valley as Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah appears increasingly helpless and isolated. Executive Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR visited the state last month for an assessment. His report:



MEHRAJ-UD-DIN

FOR the people of Kashmir, it has been a long hot summer of discontent and anguish, bloodshed and betrayal, pledges and apostasy. And things do not promise to get better even as the chinars and the paddy begin to ripen in the autumn breezes. The state is festering like a sensitive gumboil. Touch any part of it and there's a painfully violent eruption.

In the last fortnight, gunmen, said to belong to radical groups, have attacked the houses of police officials and judges. And during the last six months, at least 10 people have been killed and hundreds injured in dozens of violent demonstrations that have ripped through the state. Lamented Maulana Farooq, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah's erstwhile political ally and the mirwaiz of north Kashmir: "My heart bleeds for this valley of tears." Proclaimed the feisty former chief minister and Abdullah's brother-in-law, Gul Shah: "This state should return to governor's rule. Jagmohan was a far better ruler than Abdullah." Ironically, Shah was ousted from power in 1985 on the recommendation of none other than Jagmohan.

Maulana Iftiqar Ansari, the wealthy Congress(I) Shia leader, and Srinagar-based Maruti dealer, has also developed a dark perception about his mountainous border state: "I'm very worried," he admits. "The Jamaat-e-Islami is on the rise. The maulvis, the Wahabis and other groups who are riding on pro-Islamic and anti-Centre sentiments are now arrayed against Farooq Abdullah's secular policies and are ready to strike at the same time. It is my duty to oppose them."

Ansari's views are echoed by many persons of prominence in Srinagar and New Delhi, especially by supporters of the chief minister who is now viewed as an embattled and somewhat lonely figure in desperate need of shoring up ever since he came to power some 21 months ago after a political alliance with the Congress(I). He has himself regularly attributed the causes of tension in the valley to unpatriotic, anti-national, pro-Pakistan forces.

But this is a facile view of the politics of the valley, one that beleaguered leaders have always found convenient—one with which they can damn their opponents and earn brownie points with New Delhi, which has mostly viewed the Kashmiris as a suspect population in need of taming by a "pro-nationalist" saviour.

The "anti-national" bells being sounded by the present leadership are, however, in themselves a bellweather of something rotten in the state. Demonstrations in Srinagar and Baramulla have had the bitter edge of anti-Indianism. The Jamaat-e-Islami in south Kashmir and radical groups like the People's League continue to be of nuisance value, in being able to attract young cadre-minded recruits who still question the state's accession to India and demand a return to *Nizam-e-Mustafa* (Quranic rule) in the Assembly.

Such anachronistic demands are really latter day symptoms of a deepening political social and economic malaise within the state. As a National Conference (NC) MP, A.R. Kabuli, candidly admits: "The trouble is that we have failed to deliver on all fronts. Our party's very credibility is at stake. Others stand ready to steal the march."

There is little direct liaison between the Government and the people. There are divisions within the Government, the ruling NC-Congress(I) alliance, the Congress(I) and the NC itself. Says Mirwaiz Farooq: "They're all quarrelling like dogs for ministerial berths and positions. It is a disgraceful show." There is a growing political vacuum in Kashmir. And political groupings, especially during the last six months, have been trying to fill this by regular demonstrations of their numerical strength—on the streets. During these demonstrations, they have faced not only police bullets but also one another's brickbats.

Exacerbating these tendencies is the absence of any solid institution capable of holding people together or mobilising them along discernible secularist lines. In this vacuum, Kashmiri fancies always turn toward religious fundamentalism and secessionism. One person usually thought of as the human dynamo most

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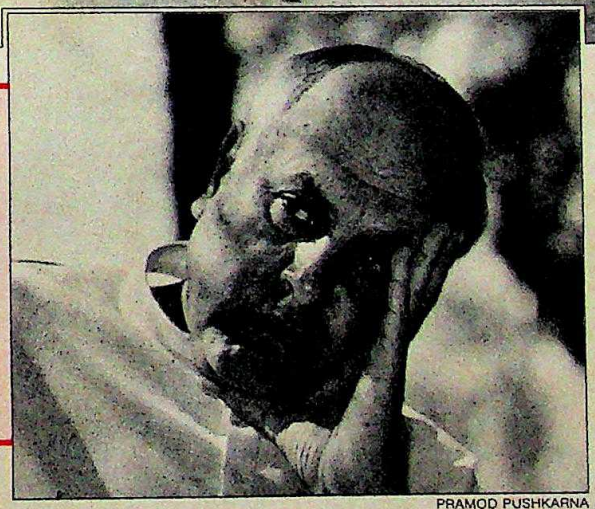

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

ABDULLAH FINDS HIMSELF IN A SOUP PARTLY DUE TO HIS OWN BUMBLING AND INEPTITUDE.

capable of holding Kashmir together within a creative political framework, Farooq Abdullah, is becoming increasingly isolated—from the people, his own party, from the Congress(I), and his former partner, the Mirwaiz, who declares: "My days with Farooq are over."

Sadly, there is no alternative. Mirwaiz Farooq himself is a good orator, commanding pockets of influence in Srinagar—but his quest still is for political respectability rather than power. While the Congress(I) has weakened even further and is now riven with factionalism, the Muslim United Front (MUF) too is locked in internecine warfare. Its leaders appear to have forgotten that their party was swept into prominence largely on the issue of fighting nepotism and corruption.

Abdullah finds himself in a soup partly due to his own bumbling and ineptitude. He has failed miserably to fulfil the promises of speedy development and efficient government. This may not be entirely his fault for there is no gainsaying that the Centre, itself faced with a resource crunch, has shortchanged Kashmir on promises made two years ago: there has been no money for the promised Uri, Dulhasti, and Salal hydel projects, the Sopore bypass, or the installation of transmission lines from Udhampur to Srinagar.

There is little doubt even in the mind of the poorest Kashmiri that "democratic" rule provided by the alliance is no match for the brief period of governor's rule, when the state saw bold reform and economic progress that touched the lives of the dispossessed.

Today, administrative life remains paralysed by bureaucratic infighting and petty jobbery. The roads—including the "showpiece" stretch from the international airport near Srinagar to the city proper—are an abomination. The Government is also being condemned for being elitist and anti-poor: no town in Kashmir has a proper sewage system, yet the Government is expected to spend about Rs 35 crore on building a cable car system in Gulmarg and Rs 5 crore on a second golf course in Srinagar. And Farooq Abdullah, with little or no time for office work, or for paying attention to files, is viewed as an itinerant chief minister who'd rather be out holidaying in the forests of Gurez than tending to serious paperwork.

But what has most weakened Abdullah's standing among his people are serious charges of corruption involving his ministers and his family:

► In June, a bench of the high court questioned the Government's renewal of a lease of government-owned land to Salima Nedou—owner of Nedou's Hotel and the chief minister's aunt—for Rs 52,000 a month, along with a stipulation that the land be subleased by her to Welcomgroup hotels for Rs 14 lakh a month. The court asked the Government to explain why a private party—without even an auction—should make so much money out of a government lease.

► In another case, involving the Government's role in fraudulent manipulation of rosters for admissions to medical colleges, two judges passed severe strictures against Abdullah's ministers. Observed Justice R.P. Sethi in July: "...Ministers have acted in a most negligent and highly objectionable manner...(They) have left no stone unturned to mislead the court

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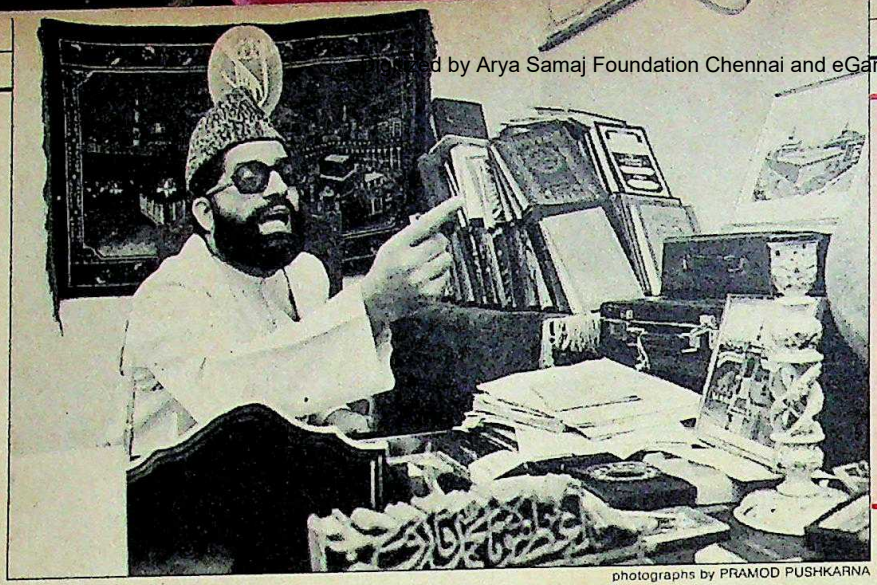
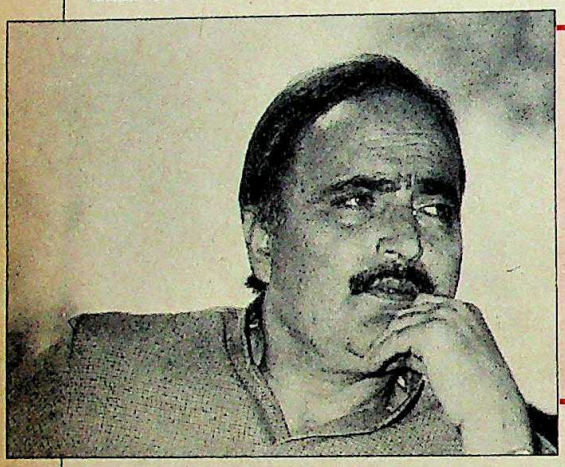


photographs by PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

MAULANA FAROOQ, THE CHIEF MINISTER'S ERSTWHILE ALLY, HAS TURNED A CRITIC, IGNITING THE VALLEY'S SHER-BAKRA FEUD AGAIN.



DISSIDENTS WITHIN THE NC ARE PROJECTING ABDULLAH'S BROTHER MUSTAFFA KAMAL AS AN ALTERNATIVE.

and the general public."

► Also in August, several public men sought the governor's permission to prosecute Revenue Minister P.L. Handoo on charges aired in the Assembly that he misused his position to favour an allegedly illegal housing colony floated in Jammu by his son-in-law. Abdullah referred the matter to a vigilance commission and then to a standing committee of the House.

► In another matter raised in the Assembly—surprisingly by members of the treasury benches—Ghulam Nabi Mir, son of the Food and Transport Minister, Mir Lasjan, was alleged to have floated a fraudulent company which collected money to supply Rs 1 crore worth of steel pipes to the Engineering Department which it failed to do.

► To top it all, Power Minister Mula Ram was issued a show cause notice by the high court in August, on a writ petition seeking his dismissal for his alleged involvement in a gang rape case.

The impression is one of a weak chief minister hanging on to corrupt colleagues. But Rashid Dar, an NC legislator from Shangas, says in Abdullah's defence: "I raised some of the corruption charges and it is to the chief minister's credit that he has allowed me to be on the committee looking into the allegations." Even Dar however admits that the party's image "has slumped. The chief minister needs to appoint more mature people to advise him and share his burdens. He needs to go out among the people again."

SAYS Kabuli: "This is what I fear most. Dr Farooq seems to have lost the ability to deal directly with the people." This is precisely what is causing mild tremors of panic in the NC. It has also led to the rise of a caucus within the NC which is critical of the chief minister. Led by party general secretary and fund raiser, Abdullah's adopted brother, Sheikh Nazir, it has the quiet backing of NC stalwarts like Gulam Mohiuddin Shah, Abdul Ahad Vakil, Abdul Salaam Deva, and Maulana Ataullah Shurawardy. Their tactic so far has been to try and suggest Abdullah's younger brother, and Minister of State for Works, Mustaffa Kamal as an alternative. Kamal has already made a public statement—which he conveniently denied—urging the Congress(I) to pull out of the coalition government.

Abdullah's Congress partners have accused him of paying mere lip service to the alliance by refusing to take them into confidence even on such crucial issues as his disastrous proposal for a permanent durbar move to Srinagar. This proposal not only alienated the two partners and created tension between the residents of Jammu and the valley, but also forced a critical self-examination of the Congress(I)'s role within the ruling coalition.

With the destruction of the state Congress(I)'s political machine, earlier run by Mufti Mohammed Sayeed who is now with the Jan Morcha—dumping him was a price Abdullah had demanded from Rajiv for the alliance—the Congress(I) is virtually without any organisation worth its name in the valley. Strongmen like PCC(I) chief Gulam Rasool Kar want to revivify the party, starting with the induction of stronger and less pliable Congress(I) ministers within the alliance. But his efforts have been hampered by a deep division within the Congress(I) itself. The scenario is confused by regular visits to the state of Central observers—Rajesh Pilot, K.N. Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Najma Heptullah, Sheila Kaul—bearing conflicting messages about the Centre's Kashmir policy, if there is indeed one.

With so many cooks spoiling the broth, there is a split in the Congress(I), with Pilot supporting Kar and his PCC(I) nominees and Azad and K.N. Singh supporting Ansari, Shafi Qureshi and Rafiq Sadiq who'd been earlier deliberately sidelined from the party along with Mufti Sayeed. So bitter is the conflict that Ansari refers to Kar as a *badmaash*, and Kar says he will refuse to reconcile with those who have "disgraced the party". His reference was to a fight that broke out in August in the gardens of the

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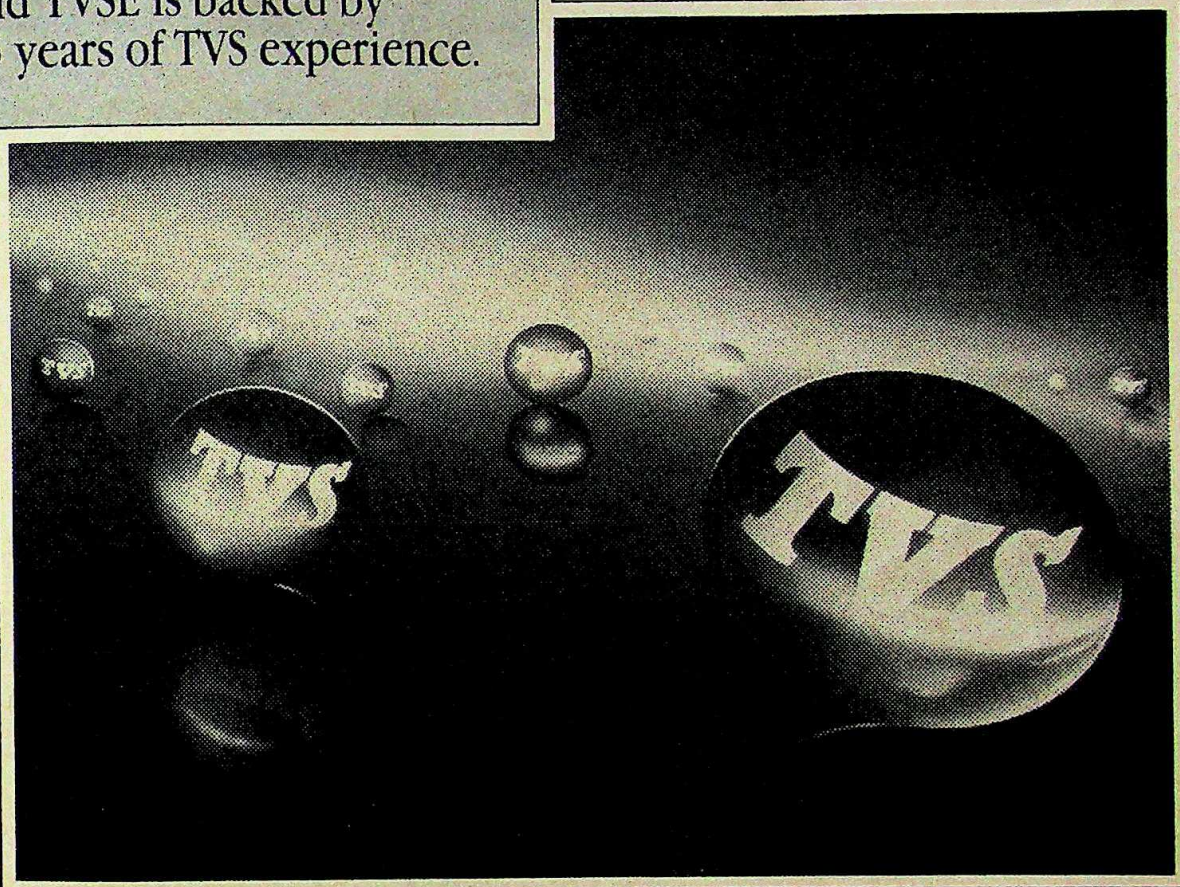

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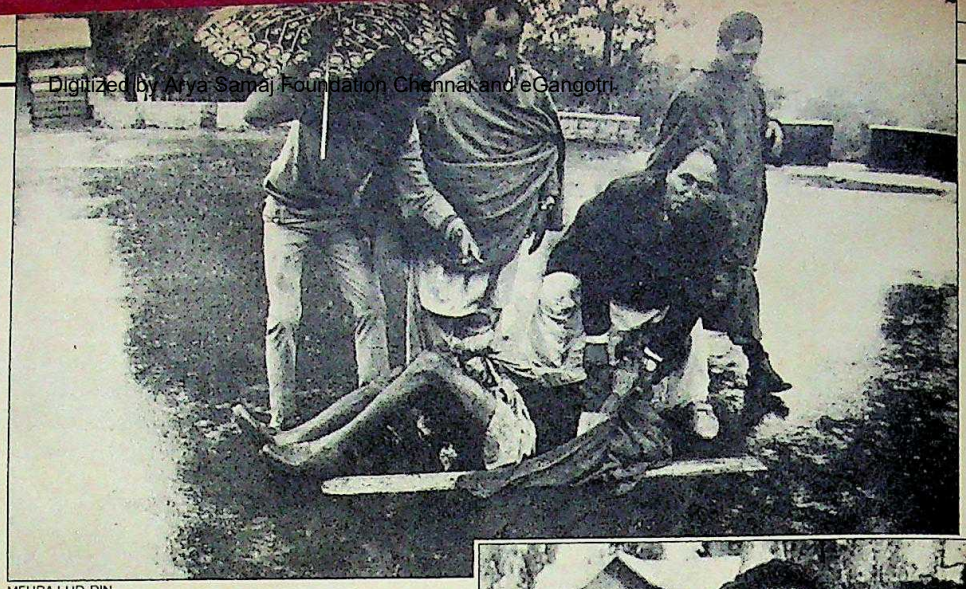

MEHRAJ-UD-DIN

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

FEUDING BETWEEN ANSARI'S FACTION AND A RIVAL CONGRESS-I GROUP LED TO A PYJAMA-TEARING FRACAS.

Fairview guest-house when the two factions stripped each other of their pyjamas in broad daylight.

Kashmir's Third Force—the Muslim United Front—which garnered more than 40 per cent of the vote during the last assembly election and appeared to be emerging as an umbrella organisation for disgruntled educated youth and professionals, is neither united nor a front any more. It is split into two factions—the fundamentalist Jamaat led by Ali Shah Geelani and a relatively less fundamentalist faction led by Abdul Gani Lone, Shia leader Maulana Abbas, Gul Shah and the mirwaiz of south Kashmir, Qazi Nissar. Says Lone: "The Jamaat's accent was on secession. We're looking for economic justice and a better deal from India." Adds Nissar: "We have power as our goal. Not evangelism. In my fight for justice, I am more Indian than Atal Behari Vajpayee."

But Muzaffar Beg, former advocate general and now the most sought after lawyer in the state, says the MUF factions have provided no alternative: "They have damaged the cause of democracy as much as Farooq Abdullah. People voted for them not because they were Muslims but because they seemed to be an alternative. They knew what the dividends were of coming together but they have failed to mobilise the public on issues."

THE mobilisation game, instead, has been one of muscle power in which the purpose has been to embarrass Abdullah. When the two Farooqs had joined hands, their respective processions had marched together through the streets of Srinagar last year to commemorate Martyrs' Day. But this summer on July 13, the mirwaiz's forces insistence on parading separately in the morning and disrupting the NC-led march was a major public relations defeat for Abdullah.

There was also the anti-power tariff agitation lasting from April through July. In an already hopeless power situation, the state subsidises electricity by nearly Rs 52 crore a year. To try and make up for losses in this sector, the state Government raised power rates and encountered opposition as it had never before witnessed. In the clashes and bandhs that followed, two people were killed by the police in Srinagar.

In mid-August, two more agitators were killed during pro-Pakistan demonstrations on Pakistan Day and India's Independence Day. The valley was reduced to bandhs and curfews when Zia-ul-Haq died on August 17. The next three days saw clashes between Shias and Sunnis (the Sunnis blamed the former for "celebrating" Zia's demise), as well as anti-Abdullah and anti-Rajiv Gandhi demonstrations. By August 26, five more had died.

Curiously, Abdullah, as if emphasising his own isolation, heaped praise during that strife-torn period on Geelani and the Jamaat for not fomenting trouble in the Sopore-Baramulla area. This was ironical as only last year Abdullah had threatened to pull the "beards off the mullahs" and to close down their 50,000 fundamentalist schools.

"He's like a drowning man clutching at straws," says Geelani. "I'm despondent about Kashmir. Our silk industry is dying. Our apples are no longer competitive. Our shawls are losing out to artificial creations from Punjab. Our youth can't compete with the educated of India. What can I say except Ghalib's words: *'Ranj se khoogar ho insaan to mit jaata hai gham, mushkilen mujh par paree itnee ki aasaan ho gayin.'* (If a person is accustomed to pain, anguish is wiped out. So many difficulties have befallen me that they have ceased to be afflictions).

But even Kar, in defence of Abdullah, says the Centre must make a more determined effort to strengthen Kashmir's infrastructure and Abdullah's hands. Kabuli emphasises: "Recently the Jammu road was blocked for three days. We had no petrol, no mutton, no rice. How do we explain our accord with Delhi? Symbolically, the only link between the rest of India and Kashmir, the Jammu highway, is breaking. If it snaps, what else is left?"

He is right. Kashmir hangs by a tenuous thread. And Abdullah is feeling the frustration. Says a close friend: "He is up against all kinds of forces. If the Centre doesn't help him he might just throw up his hands and say, the hell with it all."

Still, there's no denying that notwithstanding the tainted election, Abdullah started with a golden opportunity. When he went out, the people came to him with joy in their eyes and a song on their lips. Today they are weighed by a sadness and deep down inside Abdullah Knows this. And he has no one but himself to blame. He is his own worst enemy.

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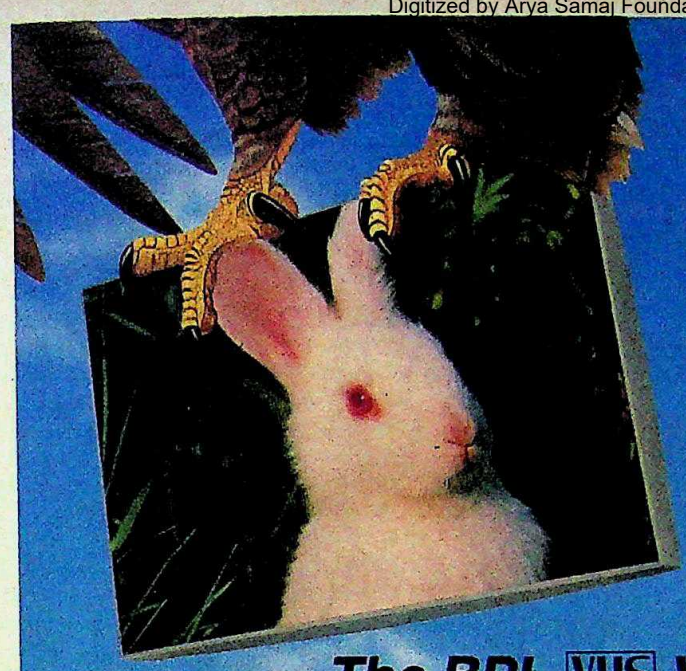

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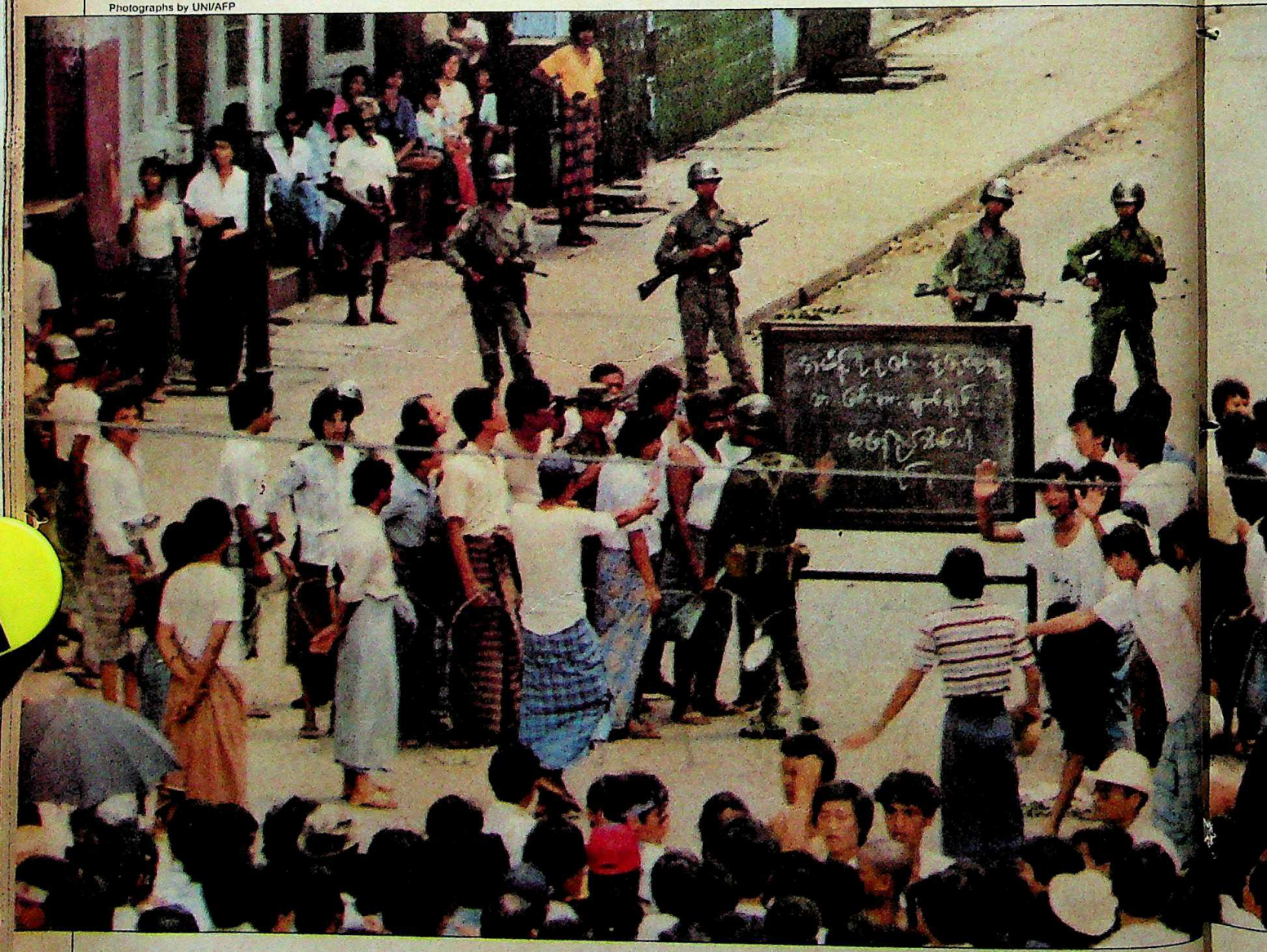
BURMA

Under the Gun

After nearly two decades under the opiate of Marxist-obscurantism, the Burmese people, almost overnight, it seems, began to battle a turgid authoritarianism that has brought chaos to their society and economy. Special Correspondent RAMINDAR SINGH travelled to Thailand and the Burma border to contact Burmese expatriates and students and report on the latest developments in the nascent revolution:

ON the streets of Rangoon reigns a calm filled with tension and foreboding. Tension because no one is certain whether the students, who have been lying low since the army coup of September 18, will take up the gauntlet and march out onto the streets once again to face the bullets of the army of General Saw Maung, Burma's third and latest leader in the past two months. And foreboding, because whether the students and their fellow protesters of the Opposition challenge the authority of the army

Photographs by UNI/AFP



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now or later, Burma will, in the long-term, be in for more violence and bloodletting.

As it is, about three to four thousand people have already died in the continuing clashes with the police, including about 400 shot on the day when the army clamped down on Rangoon and the major towns. The killings have shocked the conscience of the world which had in the past two decades pushed Burma into the outer recesses of its consciousness. But now Burma has jumped into the limelight with a vengeance, and already visitors returning from Rangoon are making comparisons between the incidents in Burma and the killings in Kampuchea during the Pol Pot regime.

Though the army has restored some semblance of order in Rangoon, the signs are ominous. Large numbers of students and opposition activists have started dispersing from the capital, and are clandestinely crossing over into neighbouring countries in search of arms, military training, money and moral support. Most have entered Thailand covertly from two border check-posts, Mae Sot and Mae Sai, near the northern Thai town of Chiang Mai. Others commandeered boats to make the sea trip to the small port town of Ranong, at the southern tip of Thailand in the Malaysian isthmus.

"We will not be subdued by the Government's brutality. We tried peaceful methods earlier and now we will take up arms if necessary," two Rangoon students Set Naing and Zaw Zaw told INDIA TODAY at a small border town south-west of Bangkok. "We are trying to obtain arms by any means," they asserted.

They already have some arms—the ones they captured from police and armed forces in the past few months. But most of them hardly know how to use them. And though the students and opposition protesters are reluctant to make common cause with the numerous rebel groups and communist insurgents who have kept the Burmese Army tied down for two decades in the north-western, northern and eastern parts of the country, the students are perforce being pushed into making arrangements with the rebel groups.

A few dozen of them have been adopted by the Karen insurgents while other groups have gone north to seek the support of the Kachin tribals. "We plan to give them short-term demolition training," the Karen National Union (KNU) Vice-President Thang Aung told newsmen at the KNU headquarters at Maw Po Kay in south-eastern Burma some days ago. Added Thang Aung: "The students will continue their protests for a month or

THE LATEST CRACKDOWN HAS STILLED THE STORM BUT MORE DANGEROUS CLOUDS GATHER ON THE HORIZON.

Troops stop protesters in Rangoon; and (left) students demand democracy

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STUDENTS AND OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN CROSSING INTO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN SEARCH OF ARMS AND MILITARY TRAINING.

Pictures of those killed during demonstrations being displayed

so and if they don't win they will go underground to fight the Government."

While student leaders and activists were busy garnering support from pro-democracy elements within Burma and outside, the three main opposition leaders in Rangoon, Aung San Suu Kyi (pronounced Soochy), Aung Gyi and Tin Oo, announced their intention to put together a united front of opposition leaders agitating for democracy against the new military government of General Saw Maung. By doing this, the opposition leaders have distanced themselves from the elder statesman and former prime minister U Nu, who had annoyed his three colleagues some days earlier by unilaterally announcing an interim government with himself at its head.

Two of these three leaders, Aung Gyi and Tin Oo are former confidants of Burma's perennial strongman, General Ne Win. Aung Gyi was once the number two man to Ne Win with whom he developed differences and was later imprisoned. Tin Oo is a former defence minister, while Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of the man regarded as Burma's founding father, Aung San. Her mother was, for some years, ambassador to India and Suu Kyi finished her schooling and college studies in Delhi. She now is married to well-known British scholar and Tibetologist Michael Aris, who teaches at Oxford. She was visiting Burma when the trouble began and being Aung San's daughter, people flocked around her and she found herself catapulted into a leadership role.

While the Government of India regards Suu Kyi as pro-India because of her association with the country in her student days, the person they would most prefer to deal with is the octogenarian veteran U Nu, who was a contemporary and friend of India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Western nations and their allies like Thailand consider Suu Kyi and Aung Gyi to be pro-West and would, therefore, be happy if they were to assume leadership roles in Burma in the future.

THANKS to such calculations—and the fact that the killings in Burma remind many in the West of Pol Pot's Kampuchea—the condemnation of the Burmese military regime by western governments has been full-throated and severe. The US was the first country to announce discontinuation of aid to Burma as a protest against the killing of demonstrators who were seeking restoration of democracy in the country.

Though the quantum of aid was minuscule by US standards—about $ 14 million (approximately Rs 19.6 crore)—the importance of the American step was that it sent a message to two other countries, Japan and West Germany, which grant Burma the largest aid. The Japanese did not follow suit but announced that further aid remained "frozen". Britain and 11 other members of the European Economic Community directed their ambassadors in Rangoon to deliver strong protest notes to the Burmese foreign office condemning "in the strongest possible terms the renewed killings of unarmed demonstrators".

The French statement seemed even stronger: it urged the Burmese authorities to "end its policy of repression...and violence which is in open contradiction to the wishes expressed by the Burmese people in recent weeks for a political system guaranteeing human rights and democracy". China too expressed concern, and hoped that the pro-democracy movement in Burma would not turn into a bloodbath.

But among the sizeable Burmese community in Thailand there was disappointment that other neighbouring nations, particularly Thailand, India and the Association of South-East Asian Nation countries had not condemned the gunning down of demonstrating students in Rangoon and other towns. "We expected a strong statement of condemnation from Rajiv Gandhi whose mother Indira Gandhi and grandfather Nehru had warm and close relations with U Nu," said one of respected elders of Bangkok's Burmese community.

India was in fact one of the earliest countries to comment on the happenings in Burma, but its statement hoping that

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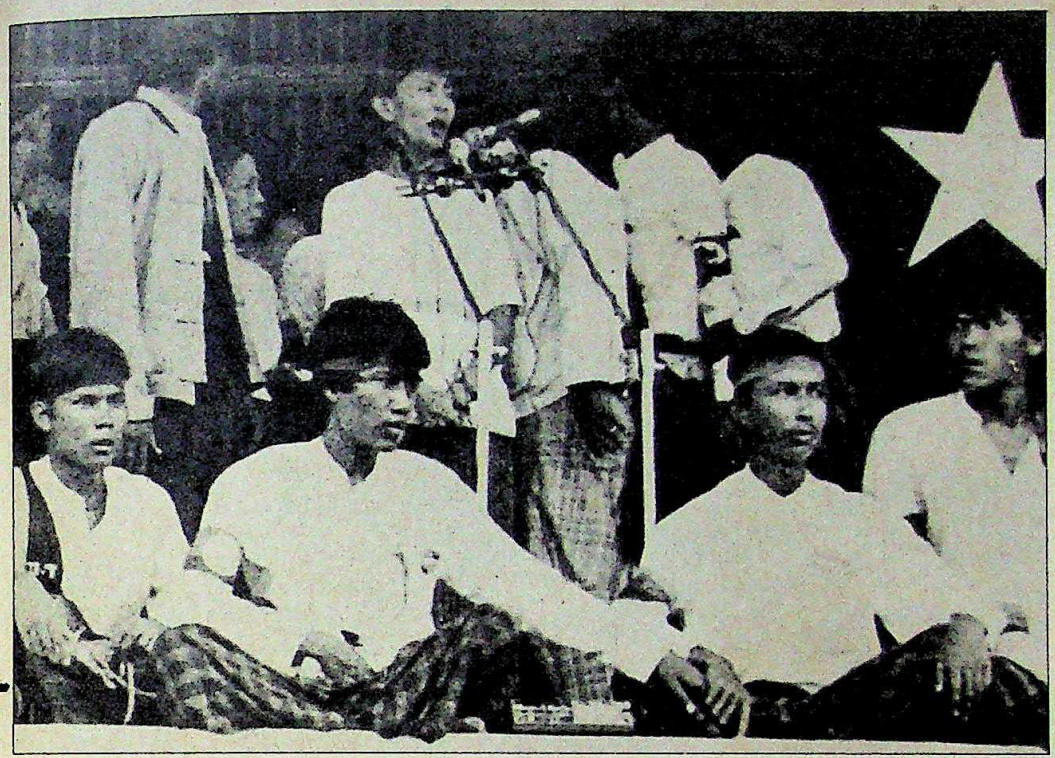

Aung San Suu Kyi addressing crowds (left); Ne Win (top); and General Saw Maung: continuing turmoil

democracy would be restored in Burma was couched in too much diplomatese to be appreciated by the embattled Burmese students. Though India did seem genuine in its hope that democracy would return to Burma, it also found itself caught in a cleft stick as it were.

The dilemma arose because the Rajiv Government, and his mother's earlier, had tried desperately to improve relations with the government of Ne Win and his appointed successors. During his visit to Rangoon, Rajiv had promised that India would help Burma over its foreign currency crisis by buying two lakh tonnes of rice annually, and expanding trade in other fields.

Besides, even government officials admit that Burmese authorities had cooperated with India in trying to stem cross-border traffic by insurgents belonging to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the Mizo National Front as well as other insurgent groups from Tripura and Manipur.

Thus the trouble that had erupted in Burma placed South Block in something of a quandary about how far it should go in criticising a government with which it may have to keep dealing in the future. The Government's predicament is genuine in other ways too. India shares a nearly 1000-mile land border with Burma and much of that border is along insurgent-affected territory. Indian insurgents have traditionally maintained their headquarters in Burma and it was with difficulty that Delhi managed to convince Burmese authorities that they should help eliminate those bases. Though the Burmese area adjoining Nagaland, Mizoram and parts of Arunachal Pradesh are controlled by the autonomous Kachin rebels, the Burmese authorities did mount joint operations with the Indian Army against the insurgent bases.

BURMA is also one of the few neighbours with whom India has demarcated its boundaries without much trouble. And all this happened during the past few years when Ne Win or his chosen henchmen were in command in Rangoon. The Indian Government's main worry, say officials of the Foreign Ministry, is that prolonged trouble in Burma could lead to a civil war and effectively result in the setting up of semi-independent states in the areas controlled by the Burmese rebels. If that happens, the Naga and Tripura insurgents could find it easier to cross the border on their way to China for military training.

By all indications, the misery of the Burmese people stems not only from the tyrannical regime that squashed all semblance of free economic, intellectual and democratic activity, but also from the aberrant and whimsical steps taken by Ne Win and his proxies—Sein Lwin and Maung Maung and now Saw Maung. Indeed, what is surprising is that the anger took so long to boil over. But there is unanimity that the one step which proved financially ruinous for an already impoverished population, was the Government's action in demonetising 80 per cent of the currency notes, with the result that common people lost virtually all their savings. After this misconceived anti-inflationary measure, the Government did nothing to announce where and how the common man could get his old currency changed into a new legal tender.

Another step that affected the common man was government interference in the rice trade. Paddy, a Burmese staple that was exported even to Japan in the '50s, fell in short supply after the business was nationalised by Ne Win. Following a series of bungled steps and experimentations—in which government policy was never clear—rice virtually disappeared from the markets during the last few months. This broke the back of an economy which with its teak, spice, fish and banking trade was once the envy of South-East Asia.

Says Farouk Oumar, a young Burmese who had to leave the country recently and take up Thai citizenship: "In order to distract us Ne Win also attempted to revive the ghost of the imperial past in which the Indians were considered as part and parcel of the British colonial legacy." He adds: "It didn't work. The younger generation is mentally mature. Don't harp upon the past, they told the Govern-

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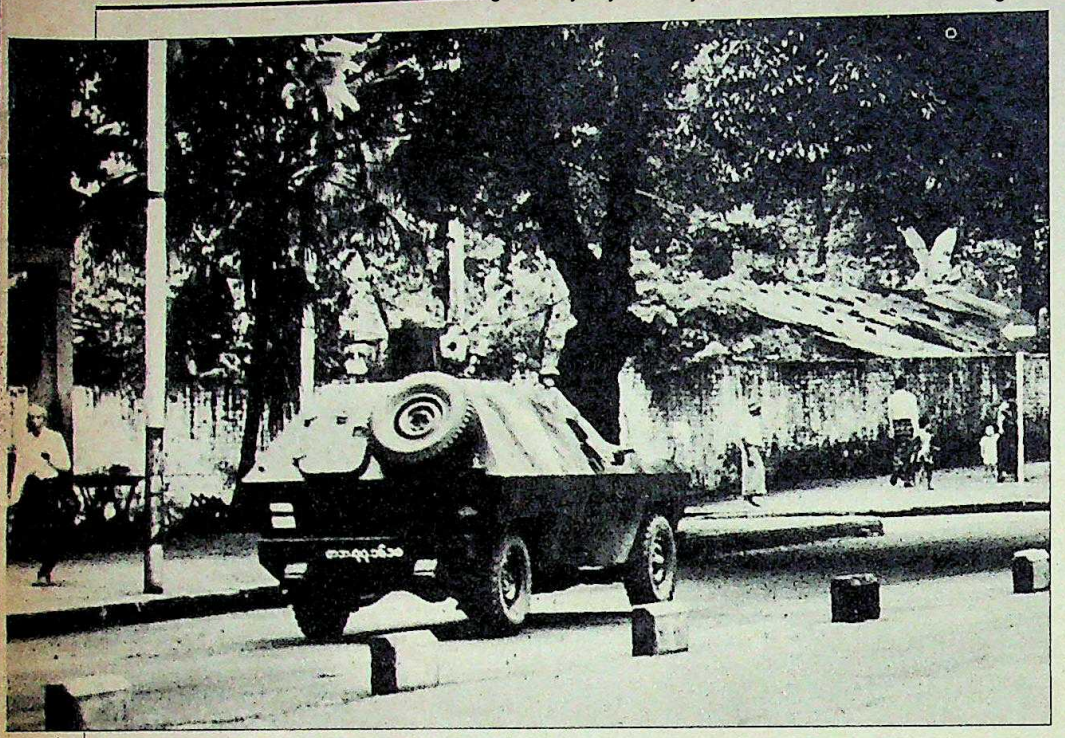

THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER THE OPPOSITION HAS THE RESOLVE TO FACE THE GUNS AND TANKS OF THE MILITARY RULERS.

Armoured carriers in Rangoon: lull before the storm

ment. Our complaints are against you. You have made our life miserable."

Burma today has nearly four lakh people of Indian origin but nearly half of them have not been granted Burmese citizenship and are virtually stateless. Their fate is a matter of concern for New Delhi which has, according to Indian officials, alerted border security forces to grant shelter to anyone who may be trying to leave unsettled Burma as a refugee. Few, though, would want to leave, so integral a part of Burmese society have they become.

But the key question at the moment is whether the student protesters and the opposition leaders have the resolve to continue fighting a government whose public face is now that of a bayoneted and jackbooted military. Burma watchers say the resolve has not been diluted, but the students can hardly face the army's bullets with sticks and stones. This explains the rush to rebel camps to secure military training.

There is also general agreement that Ne Win is still very much the crucial controller of events in Burma. "As long as Ne Win remains inside Burma, things will not change and there are chances of protracted violence possibly turning into civil war," said a diplomat who was evacuated from Rangoon only a few days ago. According to him, the chances are that Saw Maung will try to persuade Ne Win to leave Burma: first because that will remove the puppeteer who has been pulling all the strings, and second, it is only after Ne Win leaves that Saw Maung can take concessionary steps to normalise the situation. How successful Saw Maung will be in any such endeavour is, of course, the million dollar question.

THE diplomat, who was in Rangoon at the time, also revealed that an attempt made by US Congressman Stephen Solarz on September 5 to persuade Ne Win to leave did not succeed. One of the more interesting questions related to how the Maung Maung government had given Solarz permission to visit the country even at a time when students were rioting on the streets. During this visit, the Congressman called on Maung Maung and is reported to have inquired if Ne Win would agree to go into exile if he were offered asylum. The attempt obviously failed and a few days after Solarz returned home, the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee of which he is a ranking member issued an angry statement about the violation of human rights in Burma. Shortly afterwards, the US Government cut off aid to Burma.

One possible reason for Ne Win's recalcitrance, suggests Myint U, grandson of one of Burma's best known statesmen U Thant, is that Ne Win is mentally unbalanced. Myint said it is generally known that Ne Win had been visiting a psychiatrist in Vienna almost every year for the past two decades. If Myint is right, that would indeed be a tragedy for Burma: an unpopular, allegedly unbalanced old leader hanging on to power despite widespread bloodshed.

The one person who has emerged as the tallest of student leaders is 26-year-old Min ko Naingh (a non de plume which means "conqueror of kings"), a docile zoology student from Rangoon who was beaten up by the police and went on to become the figure whom students respect the most. Min ko Naingh has gone underground after the September 18 coup. He also disbanded the newly-formed students' union and instead set up a large central committee of students with no single office-bearer but a panel of over 100 members.

Even as the Burmese authorities search high and low for Min Ko Naingh, they are studiously avoiding arresting Suu Kyi, Aung Gyi and Tin Oo, the three most important opposition leaders. The authorities believe that such a step would give a further fillip to the agitation and invite adverse notice from people abroad. Instead, says Bangkok's leading Burma expert Bertil Lintner, the authorities will concentrate on arresting and neutralising the second-rung student leaders and opposition cadres to weaken the movement. That has already begun if reports such as those coming from Mae Sai are any indication. And that certainly would be very bad news for Burma's nascent democratic revolution.

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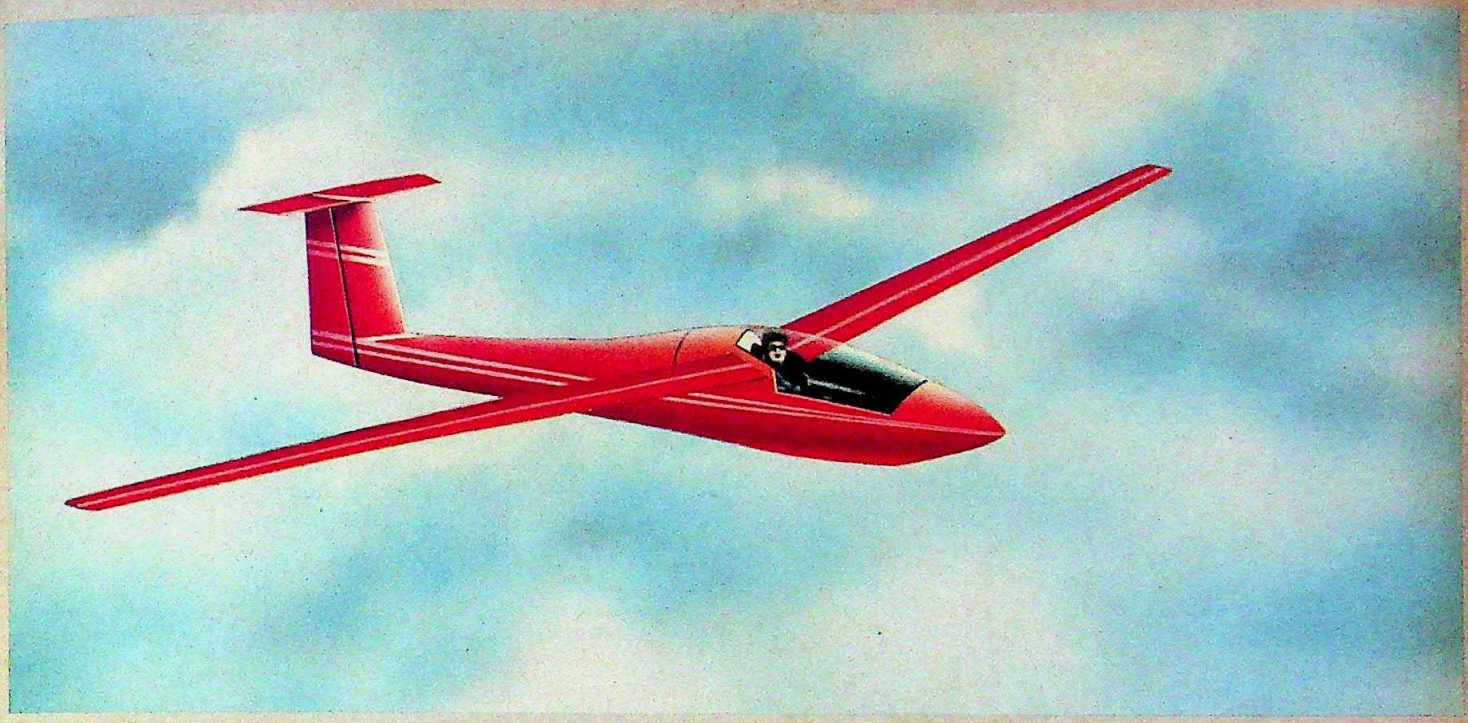

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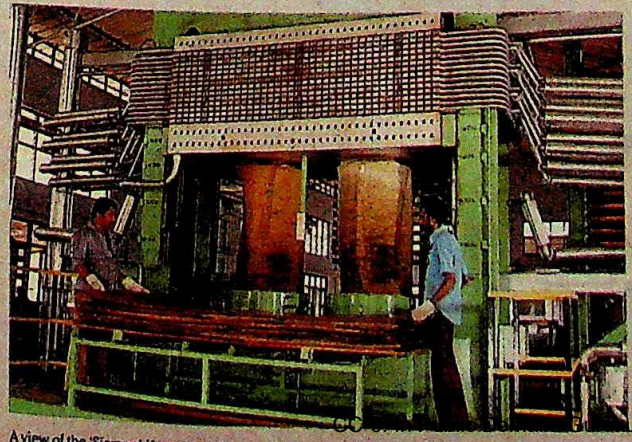

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RAJASTHAN

Turning a Blind Eye

Glorification of sati continues despite the law

FEUDALISM. Ignorance. Barbarism. Call it what you may. But in the deserts of Rajasthan, the glorification of sati continues. Last fortnight, despite a large police presence and stern warnings, busloads of Rajput youth converged on Deorala, the site where Roop Kanwar, 18, had been burnt on her husband's funeral pyre a year ago. Chanting: *Roop kanwar ki Jaijaikar* (Long live Roop Kanwar), *Sati mata ki jai* and *Deorala dham ki jai* (long live Deorala pilgrimage), the crowd which had swelled to about 8,000 by dusk went in a procession to a nearby temple.

Soon, as the facade of religious rituals in the form of a Gita recital got over, the opiated masses went into a frenzy of pro-sati sloganeering. The Collector, B.D. Joshi, Superintendent of Police M.R. Tandon, and a 3,000-strong force of armed police remained mute witness to the event that so blatantly defied newly-passed laws and ordinances, making the glorification of sati a criminal offence.

Earlier, leaflets had been pasted all over the village prohibiting the glorification of sati. Though the spot of Roop Kanwar's pyre remained barricaded, her deification did happen. And Deorala wasn't an exception. On September 10, scenes similar to those at Deorala were witnessed at Jhunjhunu, just over 100 km away, where an annual fair is held to glorify sati. Once again, the administration failed to abort the event.

The blame lies squarely with state Chief Minister, Shiv Charan Mathur, who buckled under the pressure of the powerful pro-sati lobby. Though armed with a stiff anti-sati law, the administration remained a silent spectator all along.

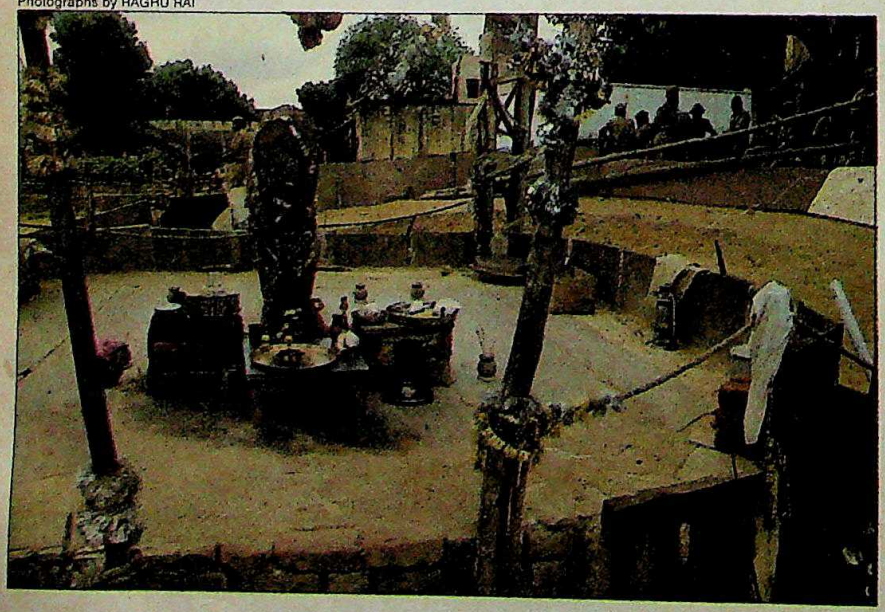
What was explicit in both Jhunjhunu and Deorala was that the Government was more keen on playing political games than on cutting the roots of this pernicious practice. In Jhunjhunu, members of the Rani Satiji Mandir Trust roped in local MLA and state Forest Minister, Sheesh Ram Ola. The Congress(I) strongman in the state—a confidant of Union Home Minister, Buta Singh—played the negotiator between the Jalan family which controls the trust and the Government. Meetings were held with officials in the Prime Minister's Office and Singh in Delhi, while Mathur gave his nod to a low-key affair. Ola himself announced that the Government had given the go-ahead.

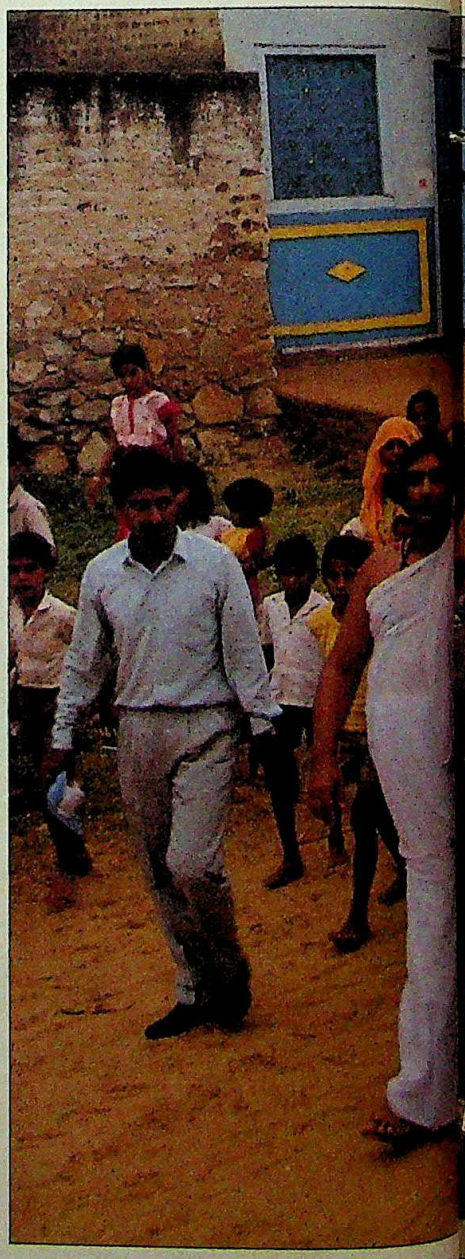
The trustees, who have the patronage of Congress(I) bigwigs like Buta Singh, Balram Jakhar, Natwar Singh, Ram Niwas Mirdha and K.K. Birla—all MPs from Rajasthan—went to the Calcutta High Court and got a verdict that the puja celebrations did not glority sati. Preparations began. Souvenirs were distributed inviting people to Jhunjhunu. In Delhi, women's organisations challenged the Calcutta verdict. Their petition in the Supreme Court drew a ban on the *Chunari* ceremonies and holding of a fair.

Armed with the high court order, the trust went on with its arrangements. More than 50,000 people collected for three days in Jhunjhunu. Though the administration ensured a huge police presence, it did nothing when crowds chanted pro-sati slogans and literature and audio-cassettes praising sati were hawked in the temple complex on Septem-

The barricaded Sati Sthal (below); and a procession in Deorala after Gita recital: a camouflage

Photographs by RAGHU RAI





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ber 10. "All that the Government did in Jhunjhunu was to walk a tightrope", fulminated Brinda Karat, convenor of the Janwadi Mahila Samiti which is now filing another case.

The successful, though low-key celebrations at Jhunjhunu galvanised the Rajput hot-heads in the state. The hibernating Dharam Raksha Samiti (DRS) came out with plans of holding a similar puja at the spot where Roop Kanwar was burnt.

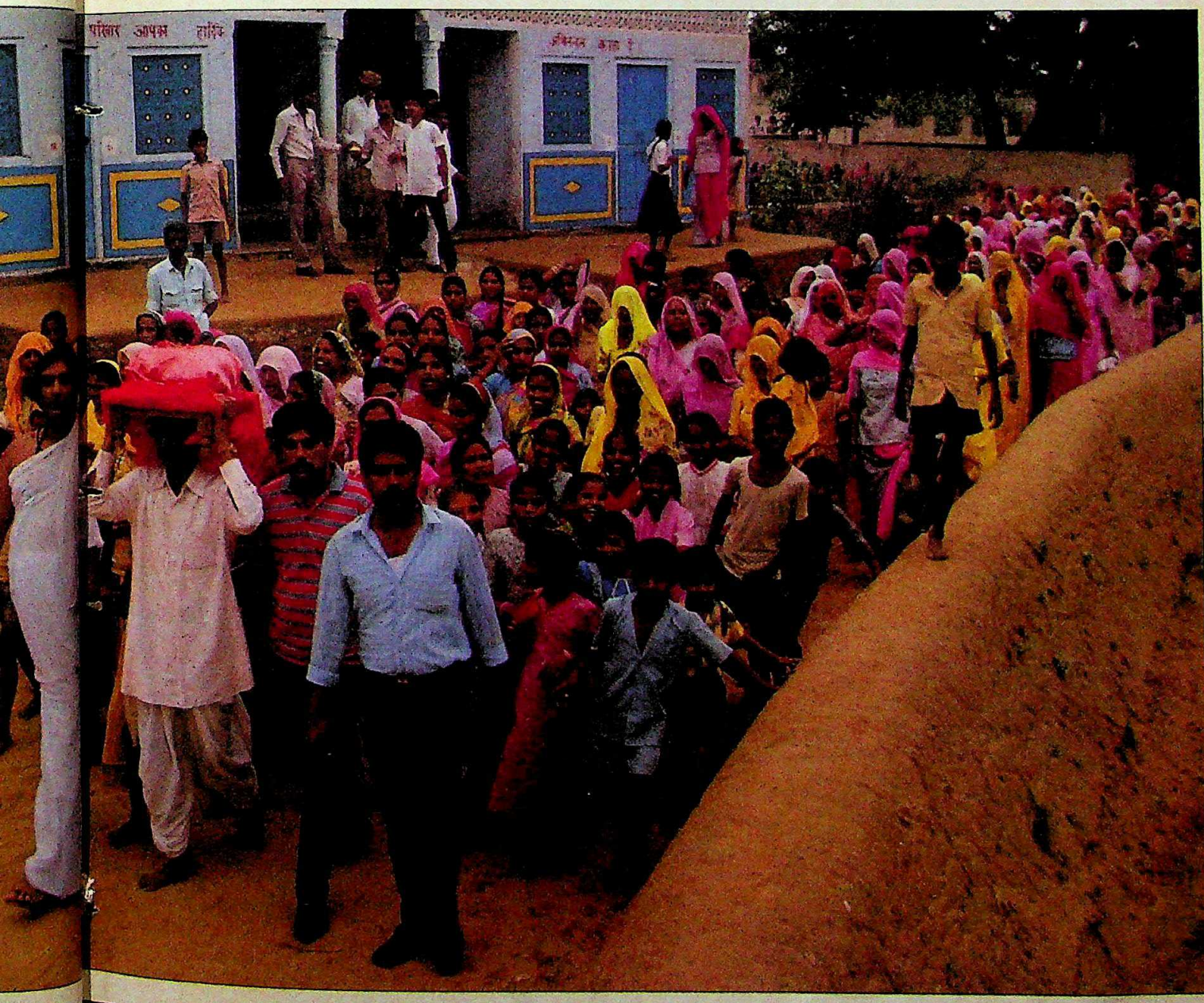
Enter Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, former state chief minister. With help from, strangely, the state Law Department, it was decided to hold the recital in Deorala to skirt the sati law. Posters came up in and around Deorala announcing that Roop Kanwar's father, Mal Singh and father-in-law, Sumer Singh, had organised a week-long recital which was to end on September 22—her death anniversary according to the Hindu calendar.

Mathur sent feelers to Shekhawat for a dialogue which was turned down by the BJP stalwart. He even attended the recital raising many eyebrows. Shekhawat's move was seen as a bid to control his dissipating clout among Rajputs. Instead, the DRS Convenor Narendra Singh Rajawat, Janata party leader, Kalyan Singh Kalvi and others met Mathur on the eve of the September 22 celebrations. An agreement was worked out that only 3,000 people would attend the ceremony, no slogans will be raised praising sati, no puja will be held at the site of Roop Kanwar's immolation and the DRS would not do anything which might violate the law. But the facade of a Bhagvad Gita recital fitted rather well in the plan.

The state Government was so sure of its strategy, that it even lifted the ban orders in Deorala to facilitate the procession of post-recital rituals. Said a senior official: "Nothing will happen. We have three video cameramen there and whoever raises slogans will be arrested".

The fact that the glorification took place made it evident that the administration's tough attitude was just an eyewash. It was also clear that last fortnight's repugnant events at Jhunjhunu and Deorala will continue till the Government musters enough political courage to jettison its overriding interests—the money bags and the vote banks.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI at Deorala



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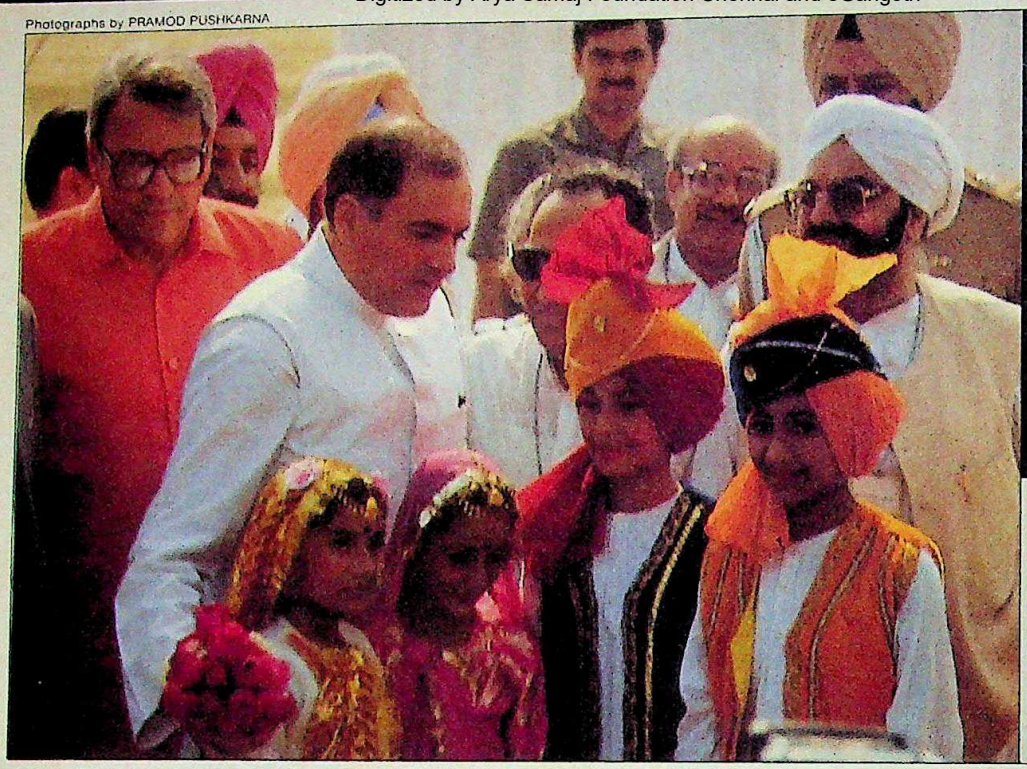

Rajiv Gandhi's high-profile tour proved that the Centre was still groping in the dark for a clear-cut policy on Punjab.

Rajiv Gandhi meeting children in Punjab: lack of enthusiasm

PUNJAB

Misplaced Expectations

Rajiv offers political and economic sops on his visit

IT was built up as a brand new political initiative to tackle the Punjab problem. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was to visit the state with a carefully packaged bundle of economic and political concessions, address huge public meetings, strengthen the hands of the moderates and set the state back on a journey to peace.

The expectations were misplaced. When Rajiv made a trip to the troubled state last fortnight and opened his special bag of gifts before modest audiences of a few thousand people, there were no cheers and no clapping. What greeted him instead was an unnerving silence and that summed up the response of the people of the state—indifference and scepticism. The rather bland and unimaginative fare that Rajiv offered had clearly failed to drum up any amount of enthusiasm at his public meetings at Goindwal in Amritsar district, Jaito in Faridkot district and Jalandhar.

The sense of disillusionment was best expressed by 65-year-old Congressman Kulwant Singh who attended the Goindwal meeting with two of his grandsons. "I know he is going to repeat the same old things," he said before the meeting began. As pessimistic as Kulwant Singh were most of the assembled gathering. So even when Rajiv announced that 138 more of the innocent detainees held after Operation Bluestar would be released soon, there was not a murmur of approval. Congress(I) leader Satpal Mittal then wildly gesticulated from the dais trying to arouse some semblance of cheer—and was rewarded with a subdued applause. The exercise was repeated at all the meetings, and with similar results. The two occasions when the gathering seemed to have some life were when a helicopter giving security cover to the VVIP cavalcade landed near the meeting ground and when Rajiv announced that Goindwal would have a new railway line.

Goindwal in fact set the tone of the prime minister's seven-hour tour of the state. The people, brought to the meetings in trucks arranged by the administration, seemed to have little hope that even a minor attempt would be made to solve their state's problems. "I don't trust politicians," said Chaman Lal, a painter, who attended one of the gatherings. "It's like giving water drop by drop to a man dying of thirst," said the disappointed former Janata Party MLA and freedom fighter, Kirpal Singh, about the package offered to his state.

The political part of the fare had three ingredients: the release of 138 more innocent detainees held in Jodhpur since Operation Bluestar; panchayat elections in the state; and an all-party meeting to thrash out the Punjab problem. The economic part had as its highlight, some sops for the farmers of the state. The farmer had to be saved from the middleman by developing an infrastructure of village-based industry to make use of his produce as well as agricultural waste, said Rajiv. Included in the package—which announced clearance for projects involving an investment of over Rs 400 crore—were:

- A Rs 240-crore newsprint project which will utilise bagasse, straw and rice husk as raw material. It will bring an additional income of Rs 300 to Rs 400 per acre in a harvest season to the farmers. The project will also generate 1,500 direct and about as many indirect jobs.
- A Rs 22-crore fruit pulp and concentration plant of the multinational softdrink giant Pepsi-Cola to be set up in collaboration with the Tatas and Punjab Agro Ltd. It promises larger incomes for fruit and vegetables growers of the state

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and job opportunities for about 50,000 people in the long run.

▶ A Rs 120-crore chemical plant to manufacture essential raw materials for the detergent industry.

▶ A railway link between Goindwal and the nearby subdivisional town of Beas, about 50 km from Amritsar.

▶ Three advanced research institutes to be set up in the state—a Post-Harvest Grain Technology Research Institute, a Flood-Prone Area Research Centre and an Electronic Project Development, Design and Training Centre.

▶ Thrice-a-week Vayudoot services from Bhatinda, Patiala and Amritsar to be started from October 2 and extension of these services to Jalandhar and Ferozpur by April next year.

Apart from these were schemes to provide more jobs to the unemployed youths in the most disturbed border belt touching the districts of Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Ferozpur.

The package, however, didn't match the expectations. The media buildup of the visit and state Governor Siddhartha Shankar Ray's repeated assertions that the Centre indeed had a Punjab policy which would unfold itself gradually had raised hopes to a high level.

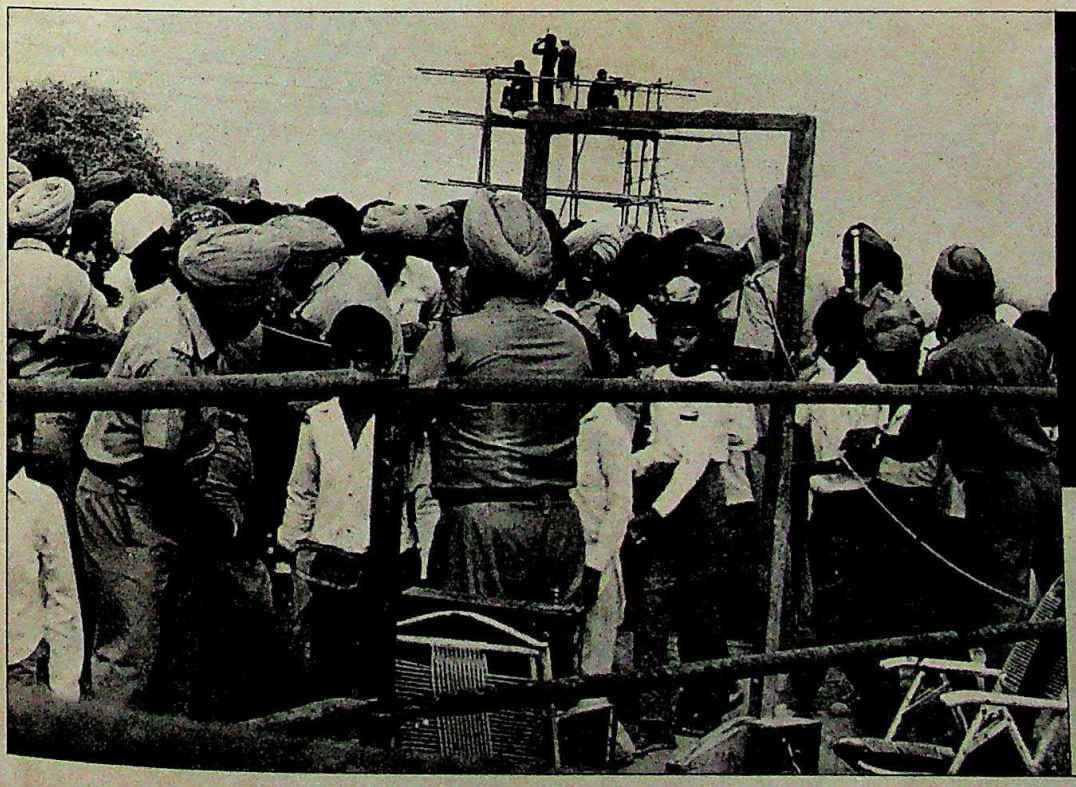
The main reason for the disappointment was that the three major projects dangled before the state—the newsprint plant, the Pepsi project and the chemical unit—had been pursued by the dismissed Akali government and so had nothing new about them to excite any one. The newsprint project, in fact, was going through its last stages of Central clearance when the prime minister's visit was being planned. The research institutes and Vayudoot services too were old hat, according to former chief minister and Akali Dal(L) leader, Surjit Singh Barnala. Rajiv, however, could have offered a new project—a Rs 1,000-crore petrochemical plant for the state—but that was dropped from the list of Central gifts at the last minute.

IF the high-profile tour and the package proved anything, it was that the Centre was still groping in the dark for a clear-cut policy on Punjab and had nothing to offer other than the much-touted carrot and stick strategy. And the carrots fail to enthuse any one for the simple reason that they are too small and too late in coming.

The strategy itself is open to question because the theory that economic development will help curb the influence of terrorists over the youth is not supported by facts. During the last three years, projects worth more than Rs 800 crore have been sanctioned for the state, including the Kapurthala railway coach factory (Rs 300 crore) and six sugar factories (Rs 125 crore). The coach factory has already provided employment to over 5,000 people but the number of terrorist crimes in the district has only gone up. The trend is similar in the Goindwal area where at least half a dozen industrial units have come up in the last two years. Therefore dangling a few carrots before the state and setting up a few industries are hardly likely to change the violent scene of Punjab and wean the youth away from terrorism.

Whatever the merits of the policy, politicians of all hues began running down the prime minister's visit even before the barricades raised for his high-security trip could be removed. "He did not come to visit the people of Punjab; he only wanted to address a few meetings arranged by the bureaucrats," said Barnala. The Akalis also take pains to assert that the prime minister has offered nothing new for the state in his economic package.

They find even less substance in the political part of the package. "What is new in an all-party meeting?" asks Baldev Singh Mann, a former minister in Barnala's cabinet. About the release of innocent detainees, that can hardly be termed a concession for the people of Punjab, according to Mann. The argument is, if the detainees were innocent, why were they not set free earlier? Releasing them in batches and using them as mere pawns in the Centre's Punjab policy game have only served to fan resentment all around. Added to this is the fact that about 182 people arrested after Operation Bluestar are still being held as detainees—though only about 50 of them can be termed



Politicians of all hues began running down the prime minister even before the barricades put up for his visit were removed.

Security at Rajiv's public meeting

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One political concession announced by Rajiv was the release of 138 more detenus held after Operation Bluestar.

Jodhpur detenus at Chandigarh

hardcore militants.

As for the panchayat elections, at least the Akali Dal is not ready to believe that it represents the Congress(I)'s desire to revive the democratic process in the state. Its leaders say that the decision is aimed at furthering the interests of the Congress(I). The reason: since the Akalis at present are hopelessly divided and can pose no significant electoral threat to any one, the Congress(I) will stand to gain from the elections.

But it is not as if the Congress(I) in the state is free of internal tensions. Even during the prime minister's visit to Jalandhar, there were heated arguments between the supporters of the state Congress(I) President Beant Singh and former chief minister Darbara Singh. "Rajiv would have witnessed tossing of turbans if he had stayed at his party meeting a little longer," said Barnala, adding that the Congressmen in the state were "a pathetic lot".

The comments made by Rajiv during his tour have also invited harsh comment. The prime minister, in one of his speeches, had omitted mention of the sacrifices made by the Akalis and the Janata Party workers in fighting terrorism, even while lauding the two communist parties, the BJP and his own party. "It was very unfortunate and unfair," said former state Janata Party president, Mubarak Singh about the omission. "A prime minister should be magnanimous and above party politics on matters like national unity and secularism," added the septuagenarian freedom fighter. Quipped an equally angry Barnala: "Let the people decide who is secular and who is not."

THE former Akali chief minister also ridiculed the prime minister for reiterating his faith in the Longowal accord and saying that there was no leader of stature left for the Centre to talk with. "You don't need Akali leaders to implement an accord you signed with the entire Punjabi public," he said, even while accusing Rajiv of burying the accord. Barnala himself had been hailed for his work in Parliament two years ago by the prime minister. Supporters of Barnala now feel that the prime minister has made a tactical mistake by running down a moderate leader like him.

Rajiv's decision not to visit the Golden Temple during the Punjab trip has also drawn adverse comment. "A visit to the temple could have assuaged the hurt feelings of the Sikh masses," said Mubarak Singh. Even officials of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee like Amrik Singh and Amolak Singh believe that such a step would have served to placate a large number of Sikhs all over the world.

The visit to the temple, in fact, was on the cards initially—partly because the security environment in the temple had improved after Operation Black Thunder and it was thought safe for the prime minister to visit it. But after long discussions in New Delhi and Chandigarh, it was decided that Rajiv would visit not the Golden Temple, but the gurdwara at Goindwal where the priests were even prepared to present the prime minister with a *saropa*. The plan, however, was abandoned later.

If the Akalis and the Sikhs showed little enthusiasm for the prime minister's tour, the minority organisations have been outright critical, terming the visit meaningless. "We will consider it as a genuine attempt to improve the law and order situation only when he goes and meets the villagers of the Mand area where people are still being killed by terrorists," said Hindu Suraksha Samiti leader, Laxmi Kanta Chawla. The BJP Vice-President, Baldev Prakash, regretted that the prime minister did not spare even a few minutes to listen to those who have borne the brunt of terrorist attacks. "How can he justify spending time with Congressmen when he didn't have time for the victims of terrorists?" asked Baldev Prakash.

It wasn't the terrorists' victims alone that Rajiv failed to listen to. During his entire trip, he had only one occasion to meet the common people who had not been brought to attend his meetings—on the way from Adampur Air Base to Goindwal. And that should have been an instant education for him on the situation in Punjab. As soon as he stopped his car and got down, people ran away in fear—symbolising, in a way, the tragedy of Punjab. —VIPUL MUDGAL

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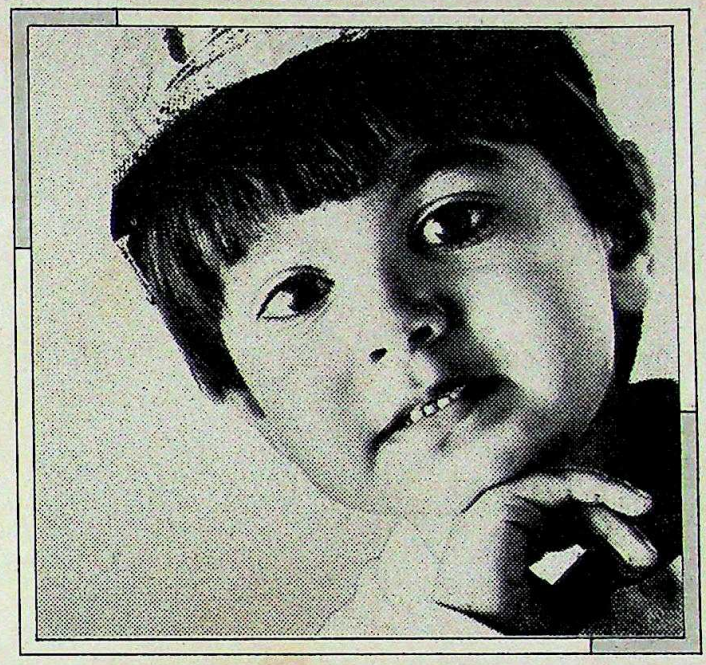

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PUNJAB

Toll Tales

Reality belies government claims

IF statistics were bullets and advertisements political initiative, the Punjab administration would have eliminated terrorism from the state. With the third six-month term of President's Rule in the state nearing completion, it broke into an unabashed display of self-congratulation last fortnight. "Punjab celebrates freedom from fear," declared the administration in advertisements.

At first blush, Governor S.S. Ray's list of achievements during the first 16 months of his rule are awe-inspiring: 469 terrorists killed, against 118 eliminated during the 18-month rule of the elected Surjit Singh Barnala government; 580 encounters between the police and the terrorists, against 192 during the Barnala regime; and a phenomenal rise in arms seizures.

At second look, however, the claims reveal themselves as a compilation of half-truths. What is conspicuously missing in the list of claims is the number of civilians butchered by terrorists. During the same 16 months, underground killer gangs have eliminated 2,142 innocent people. During Barnala's rule, the tally had stood at 790. The official claims also paper over the large-scale migration of members of the minority community—what was restricted to certain pockets of the state during Barnala's rule has now become a state-wide trend.

Even the figures about terrorists killed conceal more than they reveal. The police take pride in saying that top gang leaders like Sukhdev Singh alias Labh Singh, Avtar Singh Brahma and Pipal Singh are among the 469 terrorists killed. But the disconcerting fact is that the vacuum left by them has already been filled up. The number of middle-rung leaders in the outlawed organisations has spurted. Senior police officers concede that they have to constantly revise their 'wanted' lists.

Scores of gangs led by little-known leaders strike at will not only in the most disturbed districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur, but also in every subdivision. Terrorists Gurnam Singh Dabwali, Kanwaljit Singh and Baba Deep Singh are the new outlaw leaders fast gaining prominence in the border belt of Gurdaspur. In the Ajnala area of Amritsar, several battalions of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) have been unable to curb heavily armed gangs led by Satnam Singh Satta, Harbhajan Singh Bhajja and Sukhminder Singh. In the Tarn Taran subdivision of Amritsar,

Slain BJP president Abhilashi: key target

Pana India

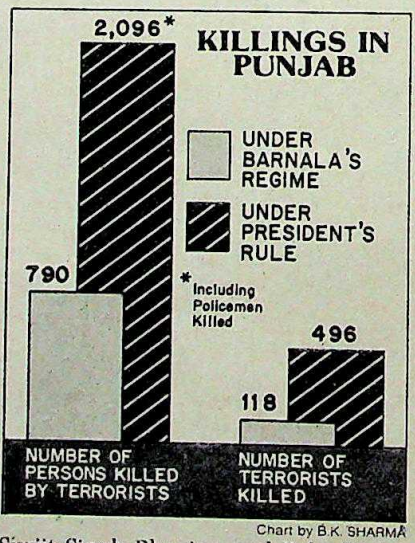

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Surjit Singh Bhagian and Baba Major Singh have replaced Pipal Singh and Avtar Singh Brahma who were killed only two months back. The districts of Ludhiana, Patiala and Ropar, which were considered peaceful during Barnala's rule, now witness murders and bomb blasts every other day.

In the riverine reaches of the Mand area in Ferozepur and Amritsar districts, terrorists have a free run despite the security forces having conducted more than half-a-dozen major operations. Recently, terrorists struck at a busy market in Harike Pattan town in the Mand area and kidnapped three youngsters at gunpoint. Two were released later but the third was hacked to death though the terrorists had been paid ransom amounting to a few lakhs.

Major terrorist operations in recent weeks are an indication of the trend:

► A dozen terrorists, armed with sophisticated weapons, struck at the Purfasai railway station in Amritsar district, killing eight passengers and injuring 20 others. Five armed security force personnel failed to deter the terrorists.

► A week later, another gang sprayed bullets on a crowd near a temple in a grain market of Sirhind in Patiala killing 15 and injuring more than 25.

► Terrorists killed 10 men—one from the BSF, two from the Home Guards, three from Punjab Police and four from the CRPF—in separate incidents. One policeman and a home guard jawan were also kidnapped in Patiala district.

► Armed youths looted over Rs 1,50,000 from three banks in Ropar, Jalandhar and Bhatinda districts.

► Half-a-dozen bomb blasts took place at various places in the state during the last month, killing at least three and injuring more than a dozen people.

► Terrorists eliminated some of their key targets—state BJP president Hit Abhilashi and Bhatinda district Congress(I) leader, Chiranjit Lal.

If the list proves anything, it is that President's Rule and the bullet-for-bullet strategy of the Punjab Police have failed to yield results. Still, the administration seems to be intent on proving its credentials and prolonging President's Rule. Governor Ray has categorically ruled out the possibility of holding elections in the next few months.

That can only mean a continuance of the atmosphere of dread and dismay, notwithstanding the bold claims of the administration. For the people of Punjab, who are increasingly turning cynical, even assembly elections seem to have lost their appeal. And "freedom from fear" is still nothing but a dream.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

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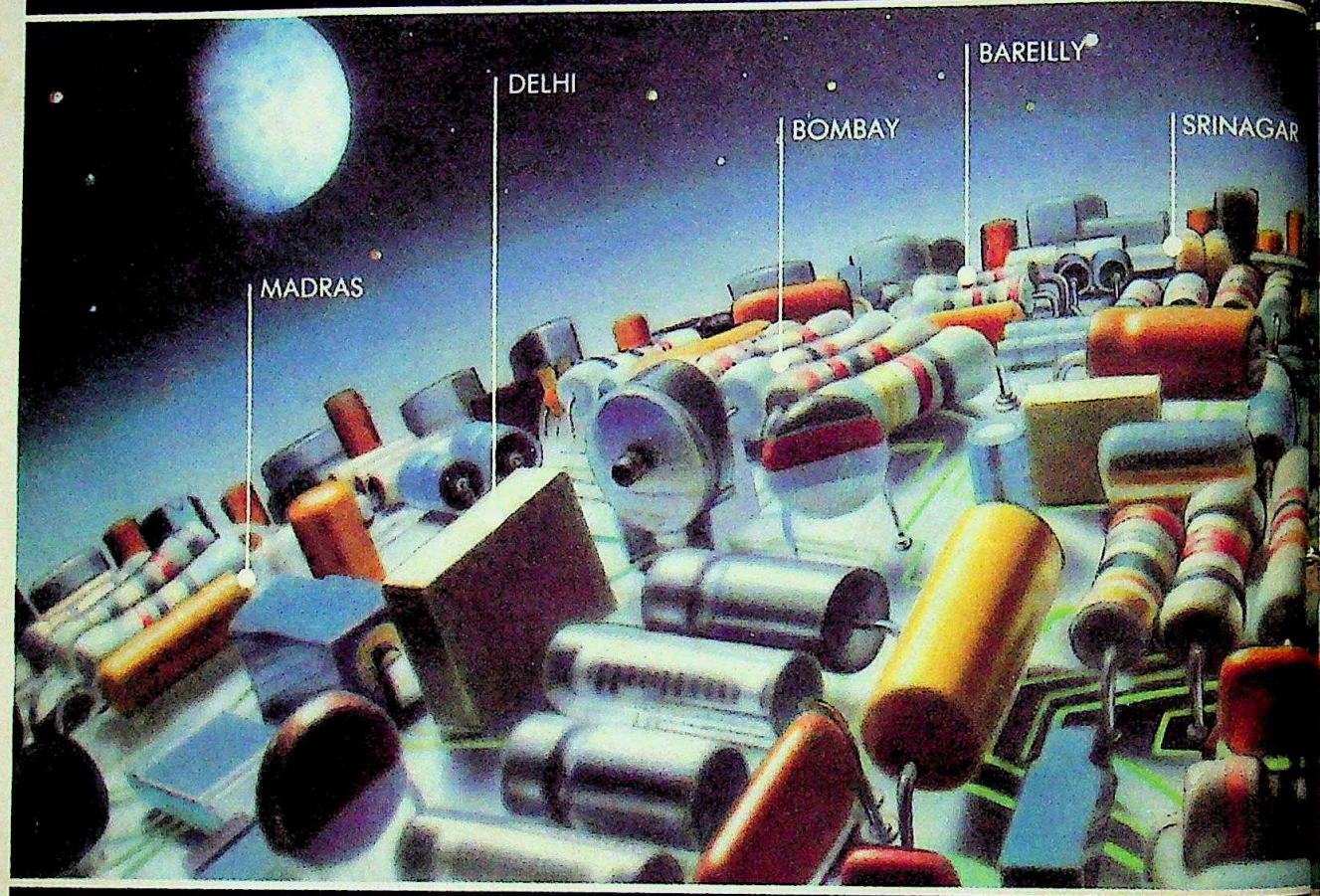

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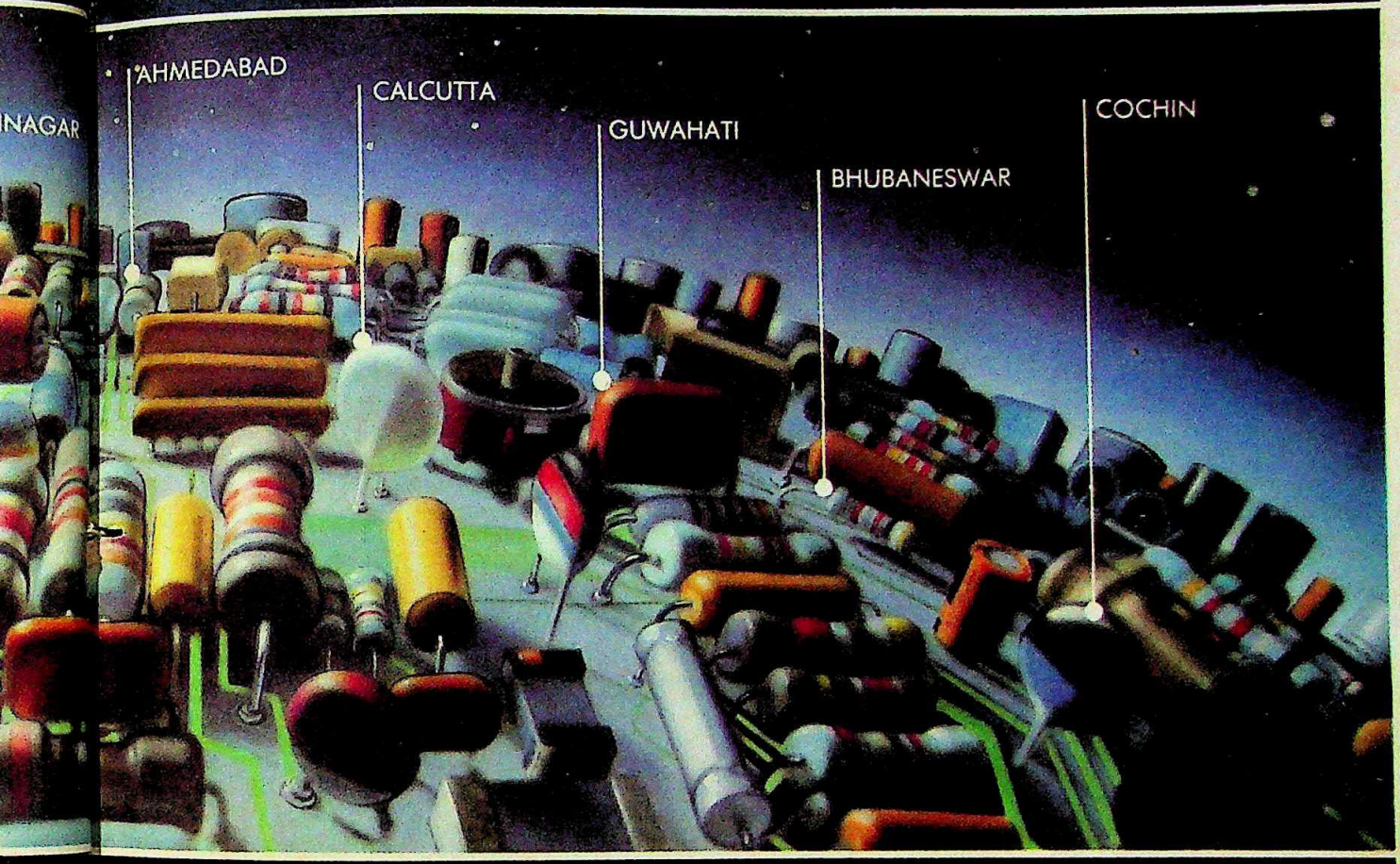

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MADHYA PRADESH

A New Drive

Restoring land to the poor

THE year: 1947. The first thing the scion of a Rajput feudal family did on getting his share of the family's landed property in the Sidhi district of Madhya Pradesh was to burn all documents pertaining to his farm. The workers thought their new master was sacking them. Instead, he liberated them from traditional bondage, gave them ownership of their homesteads and distributed some 50 acres of cultivable land among them.

That idealistic youth was Arjun Singh, now the chief minister of the state. Forty years later, the same spirit—critics say it's just populism—is in evidence as he takes one measure after another for the benefit of farm workers, landless peasants and the urban poor.

The latest in the series is 'Operation Adhikar', a state-wide drive to hand over actual possession of land to the rural poor. They had been allotted land under welfare schemes earlier, but couldn't occupy it or were dispossessed of it by feudal forces. The Government has now promulgated an ordinance amending the land revenue code and empowering revenue authorities to take police assistance for securing possession of land which the kulaks still hold on to.

District collectors have been asked to carry out village surveys to identify those who have lost land they legally own. The deadline: September 20. The information given by them will be compiled by the commissioner of land records by October 15. And November 14, the birth centenary of Jawaharlal Nehru, is the day a special drive will be launched to restore land to the poor.

The ordinance empowers the tehsildar to hand over possession of land to the actual owner on receipt of an application or suo moto. If anybody obstructs proceedings, he can be jailed for up to three years, asked to pay a fine, or both. It is a cognizable and non-bailable offence.

Though the measure will secure justice for many, it will also create political turmoil. For those who stand to lose are big land-owners and money-lenders who hold the levers of political power. Says an official: "The chief minister will have to fight vested interests inside his own party." Singh himself is aware of the difficulty. "I know it's a difficult task," he admits.

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अधिकार अभियान
एक साल के भीतर पक्के तौर पर
जमीन का कब्जा

मध्यप्रदेश सरकार

The new government ad: noble intent

Operation Adhikar now tries to change the poor record of the state as regards land laws, but the Opposition sees it only as a vote-gathering device for the ruling party.

Someone had to do it, though. Over the years, successive state governments have pushed through various land reform measures like a ceiling on land holdings, but they haven't changed the rural power structure in any way. Admits Kripa Shanker Sharma, the state's revenue secretary: "In many cases, possessions were given only on paper."

According to an official estimate, of the 5 lakh acres of land allotted to the rural poor under various schemes, about 75,000 acres are still out of their reach. For instance, in Shajapur district, a total of 4,419 persons were allotted 9,157 acres of land. While 383 of them could not even occupy the land, 128 were later thrown out by powerful kulaks. Operation Adhikar will now try to restore 973 acres of land to its lawful owners in the district.

Due to the power of the feudal lords and the inability of the rural poor to organise themselves effectively, the latter have lost whatever advantage they have gained through legislative measures. Some examples:

► Because of legal wrangles, the Government has been able to acquire only two-thirds of the 3.02 lakh acres of agricultural land declared surplus. Out of this, only 1.37 lakh acres has been distributed among the poor.

► Although the transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals has been banned since 1976, the practice still continues.

► A law enacted in 1976 provides for the restoration of land mortgaged by farmers to money-lenders, provided the farmer owns less than 20 acres. But it has not been implemented.

► Laws conferring ownership of homesteads built by the landless—on government land or on the fields of their employers—remain largely unused.

Operation Adhikar now tries to change the state's poor record in implementation of land laws, but the Opposition sees it as a vote-gathering device of the Congress(I). "Mere propaganda," says Kailash Joshi, leader of the Opposition in the Assembly. He argues that the official machinery, which has always blocked the implementation of laws, hasn't changed. "How do they hope to achieve results this time?" he asks.

But the biggest obstacle Singh will face in implementing the law is opposition from within the party. The people who will be hurt most by the law, the kulaks, are mostly supporters of the Congress(I). Take the example of Kamla Devi, a minister in his cabinet. A member of the former ruling family of Sarangarh, she owns 834 acres of land and had earlier faced prosecution for circumventing the land ceiling law. Her family is entitled to keep only 93 acres of land but it created several trusts to retain 834 acres.

As Kamla Devi symbolises the attitude in Singh's own cabinet to land reform, it should come as no surprise if Operation Adhikar ends up promising too much and delivering little.

—N.K. SINGH

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ASSAM

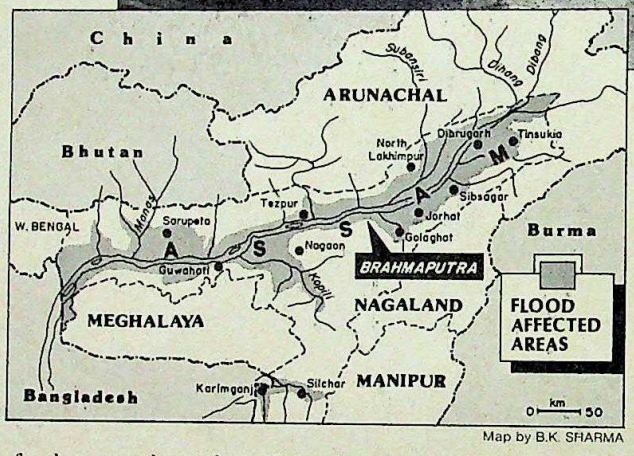
Disaster Politics

Rajiv's visit fuels anger

DISASTER politics is the name of the game. And the ruling party under Rajiv Gandhi could easily win an Olympic medal on the basis of its performance. Last fortnight, the arena was Assam which has been lashed by four consecutive waves of floods in the last three-and-a-half months. The Brahmaputra had submerged 17 of the 18 districts, disrupting the lives of over 80 lakh people. Over 200 had died while another 1.25 lakh were driven from their homes. The total damage estimated: over Rs 700 crore.

Instead of standing by the people of Assam in this hour of desperate need, Rajiv used the floods as an excuse to attack the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government. Helicoptering through the state during a three-day visit last fortnight, Rajiv put the blame for the widespread damage squarely on the doorstep of the AGP, which was even held responsible for the delay in Central aid reaching Assam. The Centre, he defended, had not rushed relief supplies as the state Government had not given an official memorandum. It was only on the last day of his visit that Rajiv announced a Central aid package of Rs 40 crore. For good measure, he also said the AGP did not have the will to take adequate relief or flood protection measures.

Brahmaputra in spate at Nalbori: a tale of destruction

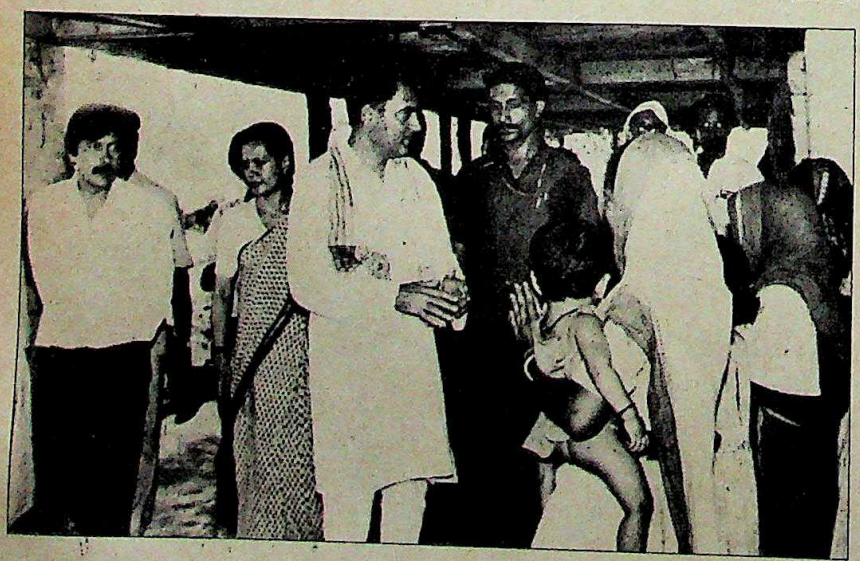


Map by B.K. SHARMA

What was conveniently forgotten was that the AGP Government had no money. "It is easy for the prime minister to say that. But where is the money?" asked Samsingh Hanse, minister for flood control. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was furious at the prime minister who'd ignored numerous pleas for aid. In fact, last month—when the floods were in their full fury—Union ministers Bhajan Lal and Dinesh Singh had visited the state, and seen the damage for themselves. Yet, the Centre had balked at rushing aid.

State government officials say that the official memorandum took time to prepare as flood estimates could only be worked out after the waters had receded. Said Mahanta: "The prime minister came down to the level of a party leader trying to make capital out of the floods." Earlier, Mahanta had refused to receive Rajiv when he arrived in Guwahati, saying: "I will not go with a begging bowl to the Centre this time."

Rajiv Gandhi at a relief camp in Golaghat: one-upmanship



Mahanta was not the only one to be angry. At Dibrugarh, one of the worst affected areas, slogan-shouting students told Rajiv he should have come during the floods, not after it. An AGP MP, Bhadraswar Tanti, snubbed Rajiv when he turned down a breakfast invitation from him, saying: "I can't enjoy a delicious breakfast when thousands of people are hungry and sick, living on rooftops and trees." Throughout the state, Rajiv was confronted with placards saying that the Centre should not discriminate against Assam. Said Debeshwar Bora, an AGP MLA: "The rural folk are now smart enough to see through the game. They're now well acquainted with the politics of flood relief."

This is because AGP leaders too in-

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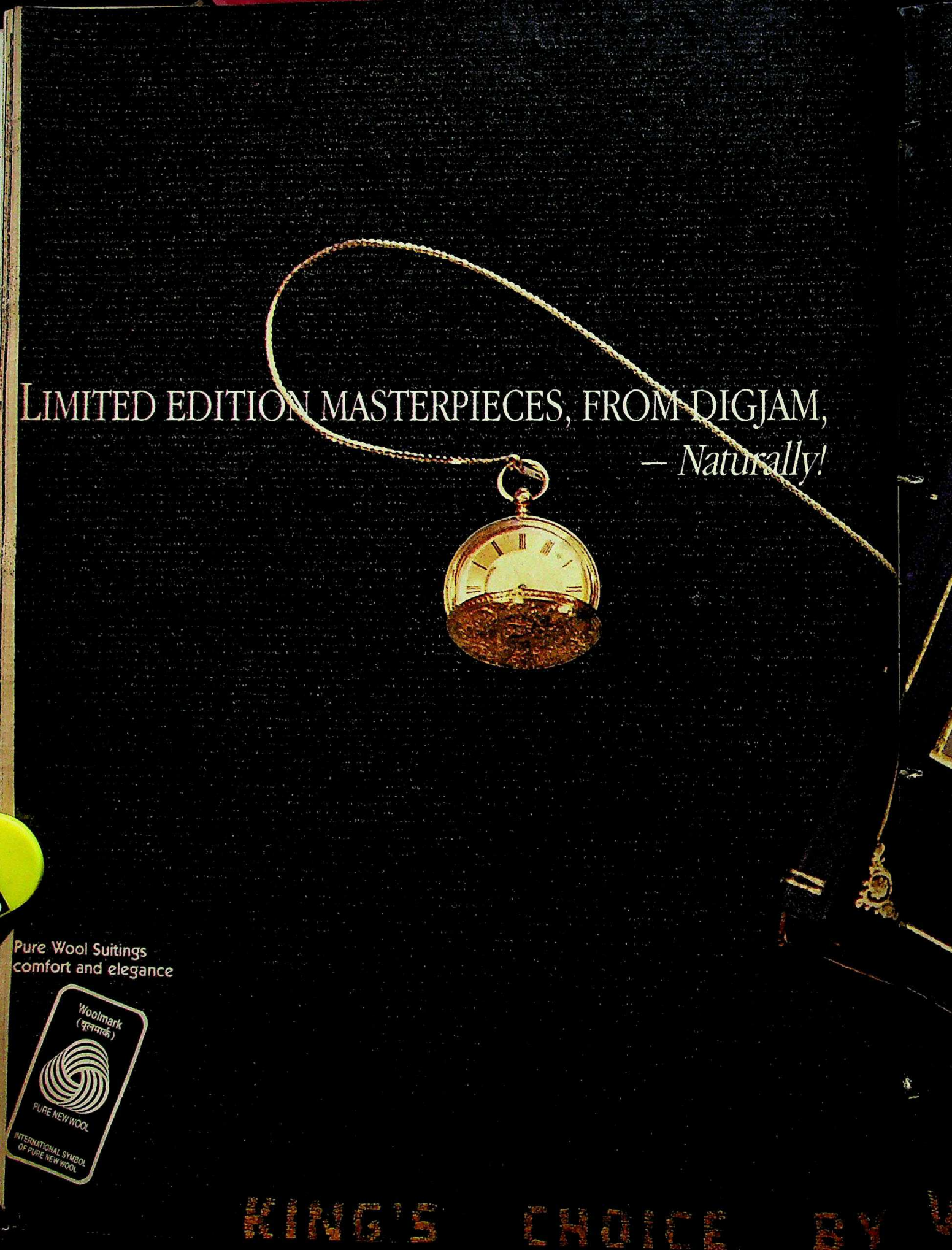
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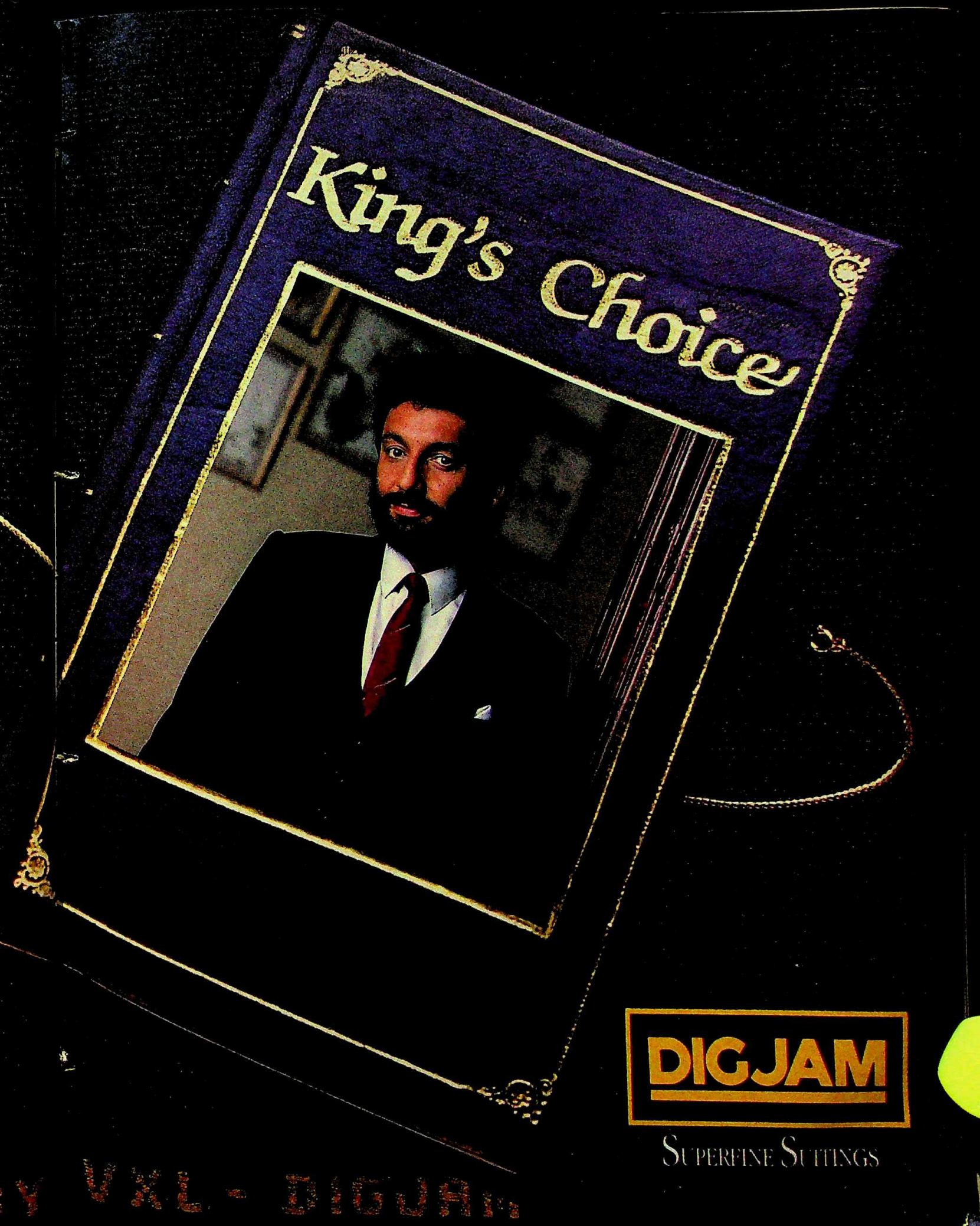
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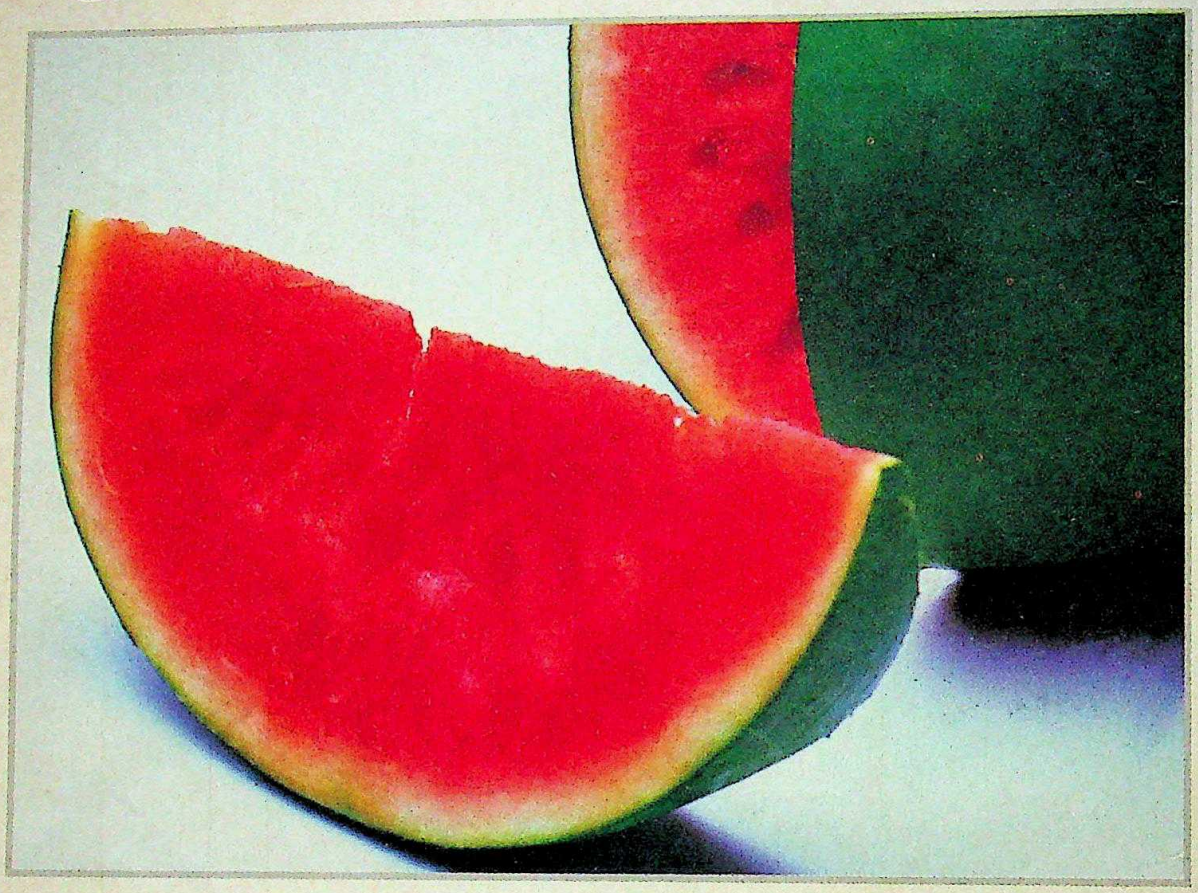

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dulge in such politics. Meanwhile, lesser-known politicians threatened to resign if their constituencies were neglected. Sadly, in all this politicking, the terrible conditions of the state's people took a back seat.

True, floods are nothing new to Assam. Virtually every year, the Brahmaputra—which traverses through 1,000 km in the state—overflows its banks and causes damage. But this year, water levels touched a new high—there were as many as 227 breaches in its embankments. This could have been avoided had the Government listened to the pleas of local residents for their timely repairs.

Dibrugarh was saved in the nick of time by the army. Guwahati, however, was not so lucky. On August 27, within minutes, the entire Shantipur area was under waist-deep water, dislocating nearly 25,000 people—the first time the waters of the Brahmaputra had entered the capital. Now the state would need at least Rs 317 crore to repair them—an impossible sum as the Centre presently provides loan assistance of a niggardly Rs 21 crore for flood protection and anti-erosion projects.

Despite the Centre's stinginess, the AGP has a fairly good record in flood relief. In fact, it was volunteers of the All Assam Students, Union (AASU) who distributed relief throughout the state. Rajiv even gave this a political colour, saying they were doing so at the behest of the AGP which wanted to protect its political interests.

While the Centre and state traded charges, the plight of the flood affected people was forgotten. Disaster politics, after all, means just that—a disaster.

—RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Back at the Front

THE National Front was formally launched last fortnight even though it had been formerly launched some weeks ago. The event was marked with much gaiety and thumping of heads by Telugu Desam and DMK supporters who were carried away by emotion—and the police. The Madras crowds lapped it all up, thinking they were part of another masala dosa film being shot on Marina Beach. The sight of N.T. Rama Rao, resplendent in red, delivering fiery speeches on gods and chariots, did nothing to dispel the illusion. But backstage at the front, it was a different story. Here's how it went.

Rama Row: The National Front is like the chariot of the gods pulled by seven horses....

Devi Lala: Is he speaking in Tamil or Telugu?

Weepy Singh: He is speaking in English. That is how film stars speak English in the south.

Devi Lala: He said he was hoarse. Why doesn't he stop? He has already been speaking for two hours.

Omnikrishnan: He said we are seven horses (aside: 'what an ass').

Agit Singh: How can we have opposition unity if we can't even speak the same language?

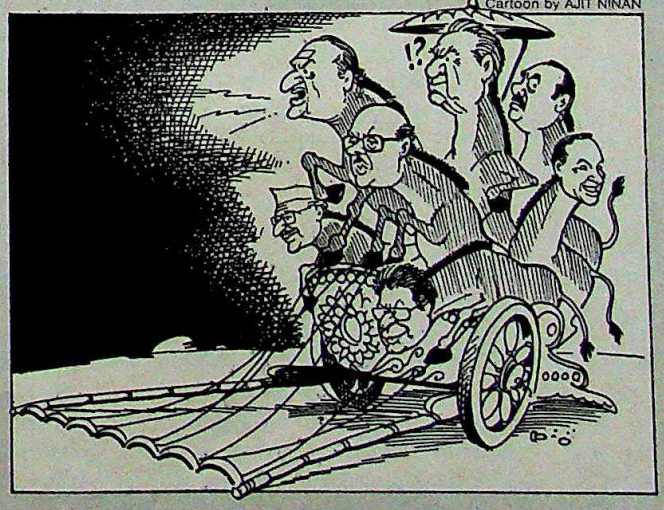
Devi Lala (to Weepy Singh): What language is he speaking in?

Weepy Singh: English. That is how Jats educated in America speak English.

Devi Lala: That's the trouble with this country. If everybody spoke Hindi there would be no misunderstanding.

Bahus Gana (under his breath): Misunderstanding? That is the main problem. Agit Singh says he is Lok Dal(A). I am Lok Dal(B). Lok Dal(C) was Charan Singh. And now Devi Lala wants a Lok Dal(D). It's a real alphabet soup. How is the public supposed to know which is the real Lok Dal?

A Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Devi Lala: I heard somebody mention dal. I'm getting hungry. Tell this Rama Row to stop his sarson ka saga.

Weepy Singh: How can he stop now? This is a very successful launch for our front.

Devi Lala: Yes. That is exactly what I am saying. I want a full lunch for my front as well.

Rama Row (continuing his speech): These seven horses will pull this country forward into the 31st century....

Bahus Gana: We have one horse all right. Devi Lala. He is only worried about his stomach.

Subterranean Swamy: Stop bellyaching.

Devi Lala: What language is he speaking in?

Weepy Singh: English. That is how south Indians who go to Harvard speak English.

Devi Lala: See. I told you we need a common language to understand each other properly. Otherwise we will never be able to achieve opposition unity.

Poorfellow Mahanta: How about Assamese? Our state has been ignored by everybody except Rajiv Gandhi, thank God. It is time we were given a proper hearing.

Devi Lala: All I am hearing is this fellow Rama Row. Does he think he is the only leader here today?

Subterranean Swamy: That's the trouble with this lot. Everybody wants to be a leader. Nobody wants to be a follower. In the bargain we are running around like headless chickens.

Devi Lala: Chickens? I'll have two. With lots of masala on them.

Weepy Singh: All you will get here is masala dosa. We are in Tamil Nadu. We can only eat vegetarian food.

Devi Lala, Subterranean Swamy, Poorfellow Mahanta, Bahus Gana, Omnikrishnan (in chorus): Whose bright idea was it to have this meeting in Madras?

Weepy Singh: Ah! Opposition unity at last.

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ANDHRA PRADESH

Grain Drain

Low stocks hit rice scheme

THE best vote-gathering device in Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's bag of tricks is getting stunted. His government is finding it difficult to keep the promise of giving rice at Rs 2 a kg to 9.6 million families with monthly incomes less than Rs 500. The snag is that there isn't enough grain to go around. And the scheme, which offers 25 kg of rice a month to a green card-holding family of five, has already been cut back. The ration bag for a family now doesn't contain more than 15 kg of rice.

The chief minister is naturally seeing saffron. Last fortnight, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo put the blame squarely on the Centre. "The Congress(I)," he said, "has mortgaged the interests of the people." The Centre wasn't giving enough rice to the state because of its discriminatory attitude, he charged. According to the figures he reeled off, 128,000 tonnes of rice was due to the state from the Central pool. (The state contributes 1.5 million tonnes of rice to the pool a year and has to get back 1 million tonnes as its share.) Rama Rao's figures, however, do not tally with his own government's official estimates. According to those, what is due to the state is only 48,000 tonnes of rice.

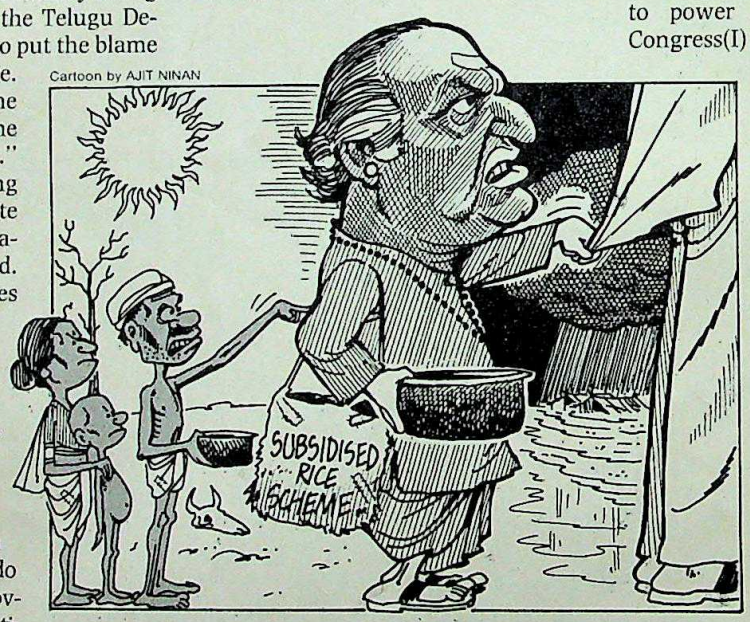
The tirade against the Centre also falls flat because it had given the state 100,000 tonnes of rice over and above its share last year. What really got the scheme into trouble were the successive droughts. Usually, the Civil Supplies Corporation buys 1.40 million tonnes of rice from the millers and that, together with the 1 million tonnes from the Central pool, sustains the public distribution system. The drought made it difficult for the state to do that. And when the stocks started depleting, the Government in July decided to stop the supply of rice, at Rs 2.65 a kg, to 3.1 million yellow card-holders—families with incomes above Rs 500 a month.

The green card-holders were treated more cautiously. "They are to get 25 kg of rice, but we make sure they get at least 15 kg a month," says Civil Supplies Commissioner J. Harinarayan. Wherever possible, the remaining 10 kg of grains are released during the later part of the month in every district, he says.

It's a grim situation, and the TDP knows it better than anyone else. Says Civil Supplies Minister M. Gopalakrishna: "The scheme is the chief minister's promise to the people. We do not want to break it in any way." He also takes care to assert that the Centre is trying to sabotage the scheme.

The state considers it has good reason to claim more than its due. "We are among the top contributors to the the Central pool, along with Punjab and Haryana," says the minister, adding: "but we are treated in the same manner as West Bengal which has a comparable size, population and eating habits and which contributes not a kg of rice to the Central pool." Complaining about the Centre's discrimination, Gopalakrishna even asserts that West Bengal gets all it wants without much ado.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



The basic problem, however, is with the scheme and its coverage. What was meant for the helplessly poor—families with monthly incomes less than Rs 500 and thus falling below the poverty line—now covers more than two-thirds of the 65 million population of the state. The figures baffle even the economists with their flexible definitions of poverty. Officials in charge of the public distribution system have been trying to weed out the not-so-poor by cancelling some 800,000 cards so far. But the problem continues. "This is continuous battle," says Harinarayan, "because income certificates produced by them have legal validity. The administration's only argument is that families which sent their children to schools that charge fees and which own television sets and refrigerators cannot be living on incomes less than Rs 500 a month." The introduction of photo-identity cards has also helped decrease the ranks of the desperately poor to some extent.

A stronger and more effective screening of the green card-holders requires political will and neither Rama Rao nor his party has that. Their fear is that too close a scrutiny of the card-holders will mean too fast an erosion of popularity. The scheme was one of the first major political strategies that Rama Rao adopted, even before his ascension to power in 1983. But then the Congress(I) had upstaged him by coming out with its own version of the scheme and offering rice at Rs 1.90 a kg a few weeks before the elections that made Rama Rao the chief minister.

Now, however, the Congress(I) finds it convenient to attack the TDP for diverting a huge chunk of the state's resources to the populist scheme. The subsidy on it totalled Rs 95.75 crore in 1983-84 and has been on the rise ever since. It will cross Rs 300 crore this year. The Central Government and the Finance Commission refuse to treat the scheme on par with Tamil Nadu's mid-day meal scheme or Maharashtra's employment guarantee credit scheme. What that means for the state is that it has to fund the scheme out of its plan funds and without Central assistance.

In all the mudslinging, what is clear is that Rama Rao's advocacy of the scheme and the Congress(I)'s opposition to it stem from the same instinct for scoring political points. Even when the scheme bleeds the state's plan funds, Rama Rao maintains that the food subsidy can't be given up and is an anti-poverty programme. Obviously, every bowl of rice also represents a potential vote in the bag.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

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VI/818

Sarees

VAMA

KANCHANJUNGA PEDDAR ROAD BOMBAY 400 026

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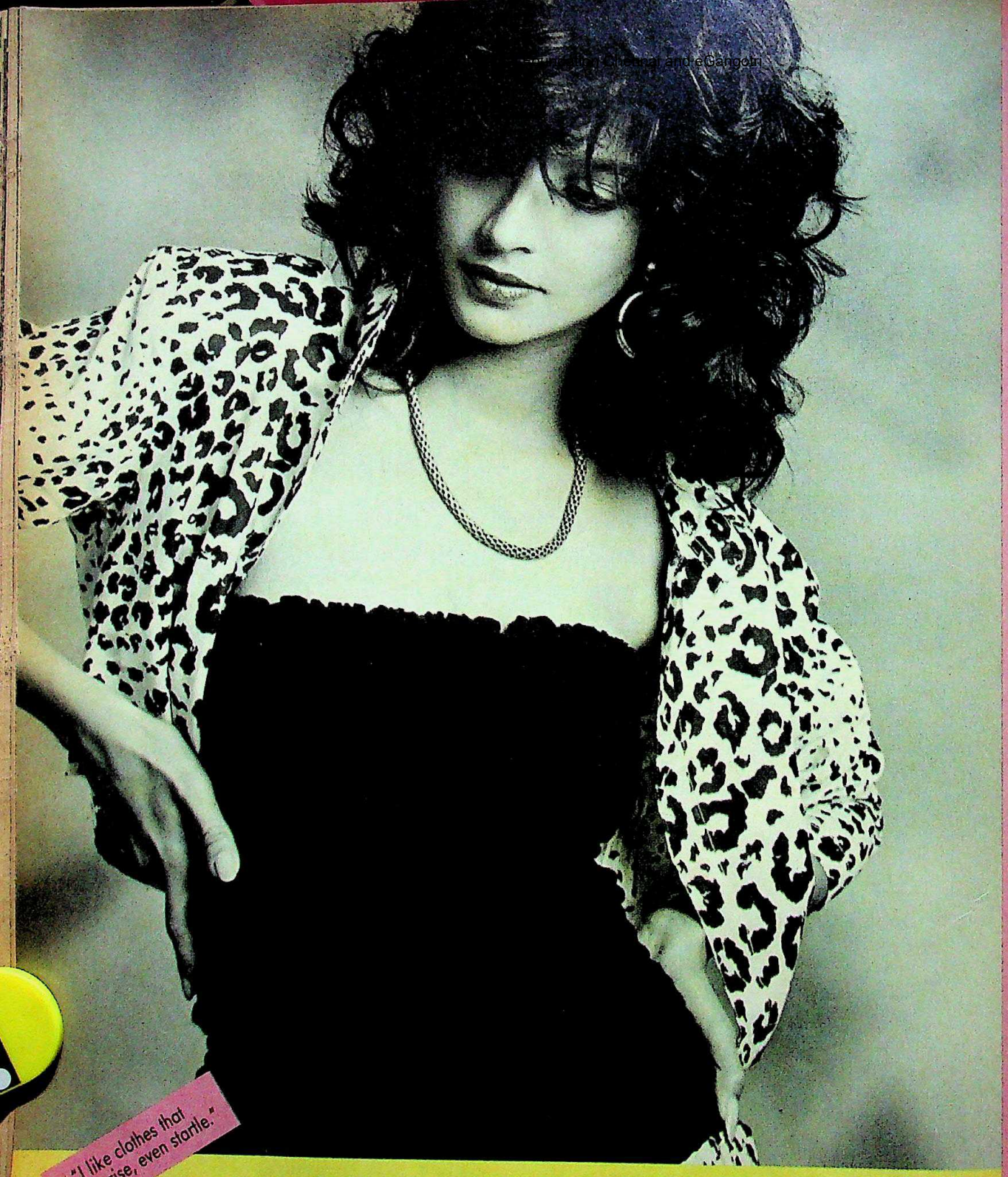

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KARNATAKA

Mob Mayhem

Sikhs killed in Bidar

FOR a state that prides itself on its religious tolerance, the frenzy which engulfed Bidar in Karnataka on September 14 and 15 was doubly shocking. Mobs of local residents killed six Sikh students, injured 30 others and destroyed property worth lakhs of rupees. Overnight, a people famous for their exquisite craftsmanship of bidriware—which gets its name from the town—had earned a more dubious reputation.

A week after the mayhem, the manner in which it began is still unclear. But one thing is obvious. There had been simmering tension between Sikhs and non-Sikhs in the town (population: 1.5 lakh) for the last few years, which spilled over on the eve of Ganesh Chaturthi after some Sikh students refused to donate money to volunteers collecting funds for the celebrations.

Since Guru Nanak visited Bidar nearly 475 years ago, a small Sikh community has lived here—the local gurdwara Guru Nanak Jhira Sahib dates from this time. But it's been only 20 years since the Guru Nanak Foundation—which has the rights of a minority institution—began expanding its activities. A hospital, a school, an engineering college and later a polytechnic were started by it—the total student strength in them is around 2,000. The foundation also proposed to set up a medical college. That, says its chairman Joga Singh, was the actual cause of the riot. "The trouble was inspired by rival educational societies wanting to scuttle our attempts to get permission to start a medical college." He alleged that Kashinath Rao Belure, of the Rashtriya Rachnatmak Karya Samithi, was behind the attacks. Denied Belure: "Joga Singh's failure to make Sikhs part of the community in Bidar is responsible for the trouble."

That a local-outsider divide existed is obvious. Most students of the Guru Nanak Dev Engineering College and the polytechnic were not locals—Sikhs from various parts of the country. As hostels were still to be built, many stayed in groups in rented private houses.

Reports of misbehaviour by the students were common. Charged a resident: "All college-goers are boisterous and indulge in some mischief. But some of them, staying away from home and enjoying full freedom, openly misbehaved in public places." Complaints were made to the police on this score. But a final year engineering college student, Anup Singh, counters: "The locals are envious as we live a good life and they don't want to see any one prosper."

SHARAD SAXENA/The Times of India

Sikhs protest before the PM's house

This may have prompted the strong local opposition to the foundation's proposal to start a medical college. An all-party bandh was observed in Bidar on September 28 last year to focus on the resentment. Said a district official: "The Sikhs are a small minority here and won't be over 4,000 on any day, even if visitors to the gurdwara are included. But they've antagonised people by the students' misbehaviour and by enrolling mostly Sikhs and ignoring locals."

The actual outbreak of violence on September 14, however, caught the police unawares, even though men had been posted at various places as a routine measure to keep a check on the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations. Admitted Dr B.E. Umapathy, the district superintendent of police: "We did not anticipate a flare-up though there were reports about arguments and minor clashes involving the college students." The lack of police preparedness made it easy for the mobs to surround various houses in which Sikh students were living. What followed was an all too familiar frenzy—the ransacking of books, furniture, clothes, even electrical fittings, followed by arson.

Hamstrung for want of men, the police could do little to contain the mobs and concentrated on fending off a group of attackers in front of the engineering college. Umapathy even fractured his right hand when he was hit with an iron rod by an arsonist whom he tried to stop.

But Joga Singh wasn't convinced that the police had done their best to protect the Sikhs, and accused them of conniving with the locals and remaining inactive during the rampage on September 15. This charge is now being looked into by A.J. Anandan, the special inspector general of police.

A shocked state government swung into action. On September 23, Governor P. Venkatasubbaiah, Chief Minister S.R. Bommai and former chief minister R.K. Hegde rushed to Bidar for an on the spot assessment. Bommai announced at the gurdwara that a high court judge would inquire into the happenings and his recommendations would be implemented to avert similar occurrences—this overrules the earlier decision that a district judge would inquire into the violence.

But the Sikhs aren't satisfied. They are demanding very high compensation—for instance, they want Rs 5 lakh to be paid to the deceased's kin. The Guru Nanak Foundation has also asked for government land to build a students' hostel. With colleges reopening in November, the problem of finding accommodation for the students is the immediate worry. Even if that's solved, the more difficult task for the state Government will be to rebuild the confidence of the Sikh community in their neighbours.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Bidar

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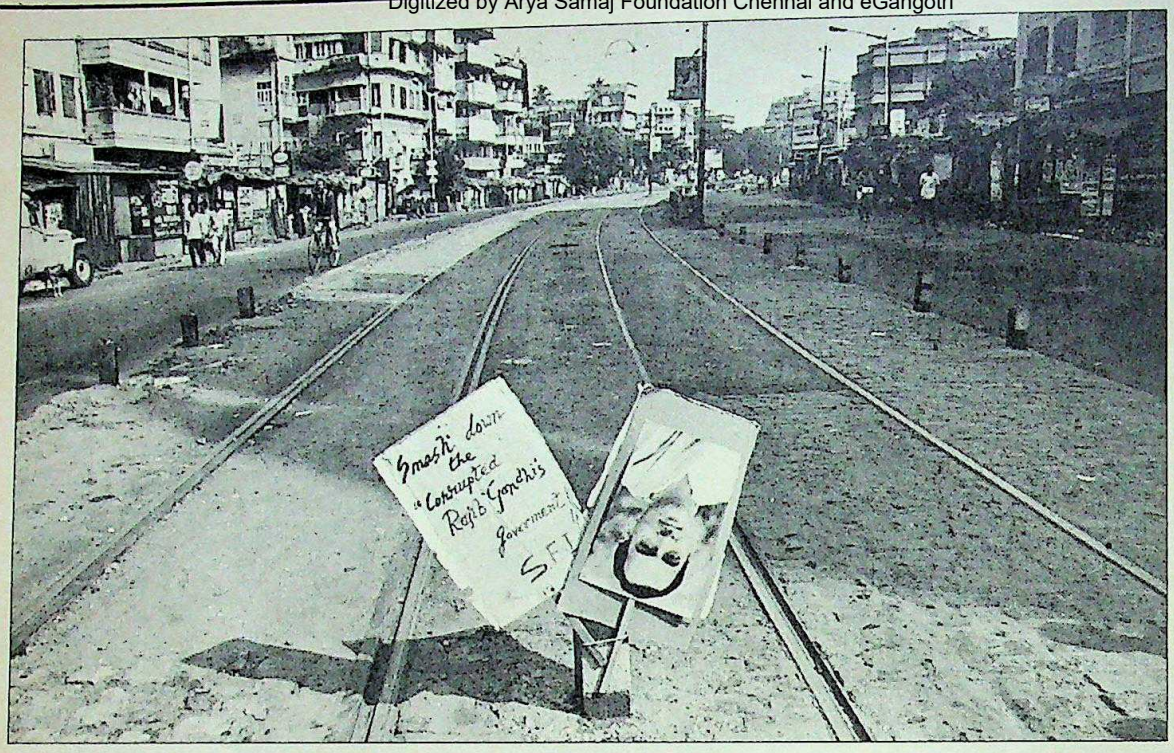

WEST BENGAL

An Expensive Ritual

Periodic bandhs cripple state's economy

THE Writers' Building is a ten-to-five government sleeping place.

—Gunter Grass in his new novel on Calcutta, *Zunge Zeigen.*

THE internationally acclaimed author's reference is to the West Bengal state secretariat controlled by the CPI(M)-led Left Front Government since 1977. Fortunately, however, Gunter Grass did not go through a "Bangla bandh" during his stay in the city. For then he would have found all the offices and factories in a slumber as well.

Bandhs have become a part of life for the Bengalis and a common manner of political expression for the Left Front. "It is like a ritual, a tradition, with the communists," says the General Secretary of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Lal Bahadur Singh. During the last eight years, the ritual has been gone through 12 times, the last one on September 14. Each time, the factories grind to a halt, employees enjoy a holiday and the economy takes a plunge. Each bandh costs the state at least Rs 150 crore in lost production, says Abdus Sattar, Congress(I) MLA and leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly.

The Left Front's list of reasons for putting the economy to sleep now and then is impressive. It starts with the attack on Bengalis in Assam in 1980 and ends with the Defamation Bill. In between are several laws enacted by the Centre like the Essential Services Maintenance Act and the National Security Act; the dismissal of the Andhra Pradesh government in 1984; the closure of sick industries; the erosion of states' power; price-rise; various Union budgets; the decline of the jute industry; and the Centre's reluctance to clear the Haldia petrochemical and Bakreshwar thermal power projects. Added on for extra effect are demands for the resignation of the prime minister and, the ultimate irony, the right to work.

The list, however, hasn't stopped the Left Front's critics from accusing it of masking its political desperation with indignance against the Centre. "Their efforts have the sole purpose of capturing the Delhi durbar," says Manas Bhuniya, Congress(I) MLA from the Midnapore district. But it is not as if the Marxists are doing something new. They had organised 32 major strikes between 1950 and 1970, when they were out of power.

Within the ruling front, however, there are murmurs of disapproval. "We are having too many bandhs," says a Left Front leader, adding: "Perhaps the CPI(M) leaders feel bandhs are the only way they can reassure their cadres that power has not robbed them of their revolutionary zeal." Part of the disagreements is due to the CPI(M)'s attempts at cutting its coalition partners to size. Says the annoyed leader of a Left Front constituent: "The latest bandh was unnecessary—it was called only to slight the Forward Bloc and sabotage its *jail bharao andolan* (civil disobedience movement) of September 19."

Despite the growing opposition to officially sponsored work stoppages, the bandhs do end up being "successful", with the entire state becoming a giant sleeping place, as Gunter Grass would have put it. "It is because people stay indoors out of fear," explains West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) President and Union Minister of State for Commerce, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. "What can one do when the Government, in order to make its bandhs successful, withdraws all transportation and directs its cadres to ensure that no one reaches his office or place of work?," he asks.

The Left Front Chairman Saroj Mukherjee, however, has a justification: "The bandhs popularise our demands and highlight the continuous injustice done to

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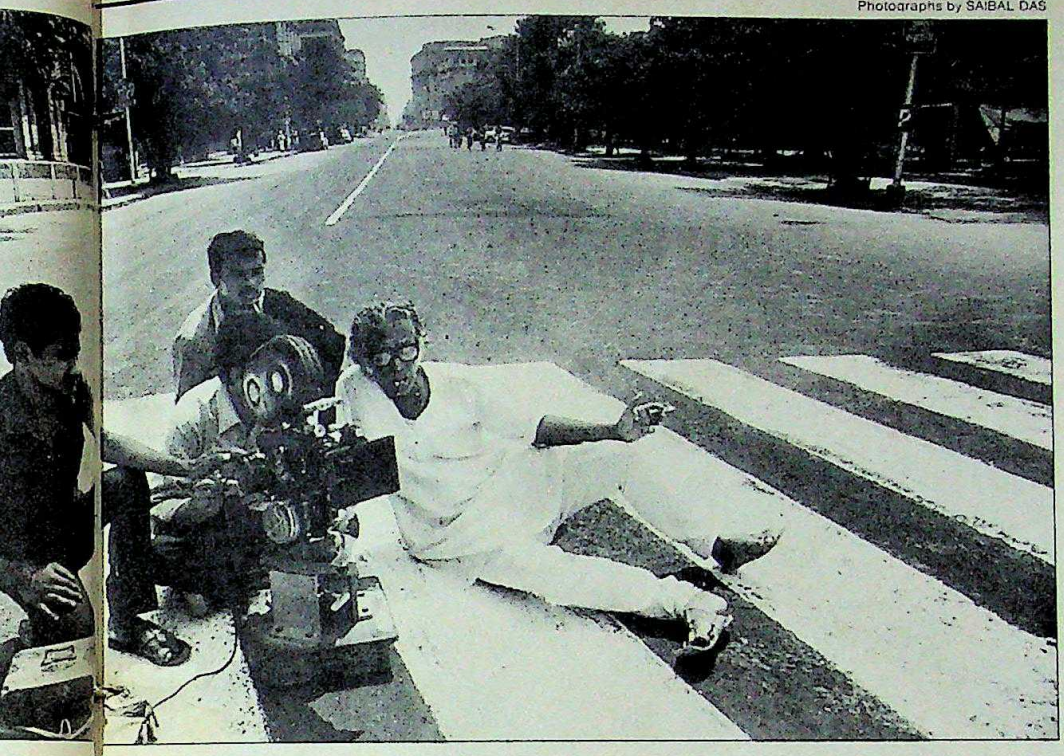
Photographs by SAIBAL DAS



Calcutta street on a bandh day; and (above) Mrinal Sen filming an empty street during a bandh

West Bengal." The critics differ though. "Bandhs are nothing more than additional paid holidays for white-collar employees," says Subrata Mukherjee, president of the state unit of the INTUC and Congress(I) MLA.

For the vast majority of the workers, the bandhs only mean holes in their pockets. "I lose Rs 60 whenever a bandh is called," says taxi-driver Md. Sallauddin. He has some idea what the last bandh was for: "*Jyoti Basu Rajiv ko gaddi se hatana chahate hain* (Jyoti Basu wants to remove Rajiv Gandhi from power)."

SALLAUDDIN can calculate his loss easily, but estimating the economy's losses is more difficult. Says Jahar Sengupta, president of Indian Explosives Ltd: "A bandh causes immense loss of production and scarcity which in turn fuel inflation. Sengupta, like many industrialists, refrains from "questioning the wisdom of political leaders" in stopping work but feels bandhs aren't the right way to protest against a price-rise, for instance.

A spokesman of the Confederation of Engineering Industries (CEI) says the daily production loss in the engineering sector due to bandhs is Rs 20 crore. In 1986, the Union Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia told Parliament that the railways suffered a loss of over Rs 5 crore in revenue during each bandh in West Bengal. The Durgapur Alloy and TISCO steel plants lost production worth Rs 4 crore. The Secretary of the Automobile Association of Eastern India, Kalyan Bhadra, estimates that the Centre and state will lose about Rs 42 lakh in Central excise and sales tax from the petrol pumps because of the last bandh.

Equally substantial is the loss the state Government incurs because of the withdrawal of public transport. But a senior IAS officer has a curious argument to prove that there is no loss saying, "the Government, in fact, saves its funds because all the state transport undertakings have to be heavily subsidised". The Calcutta State Transport Corporation alone gobbles up an yearly subsidy of Rs 17 lakh.

Jyoti Basu: holding a different opinion

TURUN CHAKRABORTY

The General Secretary of the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), Monoranjan Roy, admits that the state suffers production loss due to bandhs. But he adds: "The losses are insignificant compared to what the state will gain if the Haldia petrochemical complex and the Bakreshwar thermal power plant are cleared. More than 1.5 lakh people will get employment if the downstream units of the complex come up." For West Bengal, which has the highest number of registered unemployed youths (46 lakh) that will be no small achievement. Roy also admits that a section of people do not support the bandh, but counters by saying that if the people were against agitations, they would not have returned the Left Front to power for the third term. Roy and others like him feel that if they don't fight for new projects, the state will become progressively backward.

The most disturbing aspect of the bandhs, however, is the increasing violence, especially against employees of Central Government undertakings. During the last bandh, CPI(M) cadres kidnapped a few officials of the Metro Rail, took them to a party office and manhandled them. At Malda in north Bengal, bandh supporters forced out the divisional railway manager from his office and ransacked it. And one person died in clashes between pro-bandh and anti-bandh mobs near Kinnison Jute Mill at Tigagurh. Jyoti Basu has even had to apologise on behalf of his unruly partymen. But CITU leaders say that "this must be taken as a warning for bigger agitational programmes to come".

That the Left Front is utilising bandhs to further political interests is apparent. An All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) leader admits: "The bandhs help us retain power." But a Calcutta daily recently estimated that if two bandhs hadn't been organised this year, the state Government could have completed the second Hoogly bridge (total estimated cost: Rs 275 crore) and set up 22,000 primary schools costing Rs 50,000 each.

The Marxists, though, don't see things that way. Says Jyoti Basu about the last bandh: "I am happy that the people have once again demonstrated they are not beggars." But the problem is that repeated disruption of work and crippling of the economy may eventually wind up making them just that.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

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KERALA

Lucky Streak

LDF crosses a few hurdles

THERE is a tide in the affairs of the Kerala Government. The ruling Marxist-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) is riding a wave of good luck. In the last one month, it has given a face-lift to its image, humbled some of its rivals and determinedly removed a few hurdles in its path.

First, the Gwalior Rayons breakthrough. The Birla company's unit at Mavoor in Calicut had been under a lock-out for three years and the Congress(I) government had failed to get it reopened. Thirteen of the 5,000 jobless workers had even committed suicide. Then on September 15, the E.K. Nayanar Government reached an agreement with the company, agreeing to supply 3 lakh tonnes of raw materials—reed and bamboos—a year at a price of about Rs 300 a tonne. Gushed Nayanar: "One more election promise has been fulfilled."

Having proved that they could do business with the capitalists, the communists then set out to make peace with their long-time enemy, the RSS. The mediators: former Supreme Court justice, V.R. Krishna Iyer, and former Kerala High Court justice, T. Chandrasekhara Menon. The rivals finally sat down for talks on September 25. Says state BJP President, Raman Pillai: "Now we have a chance to thrash out our differences and put a stop to the politics of violence." That is bad news for the Congress(I). The clashes between the CPI(M) and the RSS had so far given it an excuse to charge that the law and order situation was hopeless.

The third feather on the LDF cap was the taming of the medical students. Last fortnight, they withdrew their 38-day agitation without gaining an inch on their demands. The strike was over a proposed bill which provided for registering any one as a doctor if three doctors certified that the person had been practising modern medicine. The medical fraternity cried foul about "the legalisation of quackery" and the students and house-surgeons in all the government hospitals took to the streets. Their strike, however, pitted them against the public. Finally, the students calmed down after Health Minister A.C. Shanmughadas gave them an assurance that they would be consulted before the bill was finalised.

Meanwhile, on September 14, the state leadership of the CPI(M) staged another coup—the 68-year-old veteran Marxist leader K.R. Gowri was stripped of her excise portfolio. The relations between Gowri and the party leadership had become strained when she was denied the chief ministership after the elections in March last year. Gowri had been cut to size by the constant interference in her department by party strongmen—even her personal assistant was handpicked by state CPI(M) Secretary, V.S. Achuthanandan.

Finally, in desperation, Gowri expressed her desire to shed the sensitive excise portfolio. The leadership grabbed the offer and put the Fisheries and Culture Minister, T.K. Ramakrishanan, in charge of the department. "The change was only because Gowri was overworked," said Nayanar. So far, there hasn't been a murmur of protest.

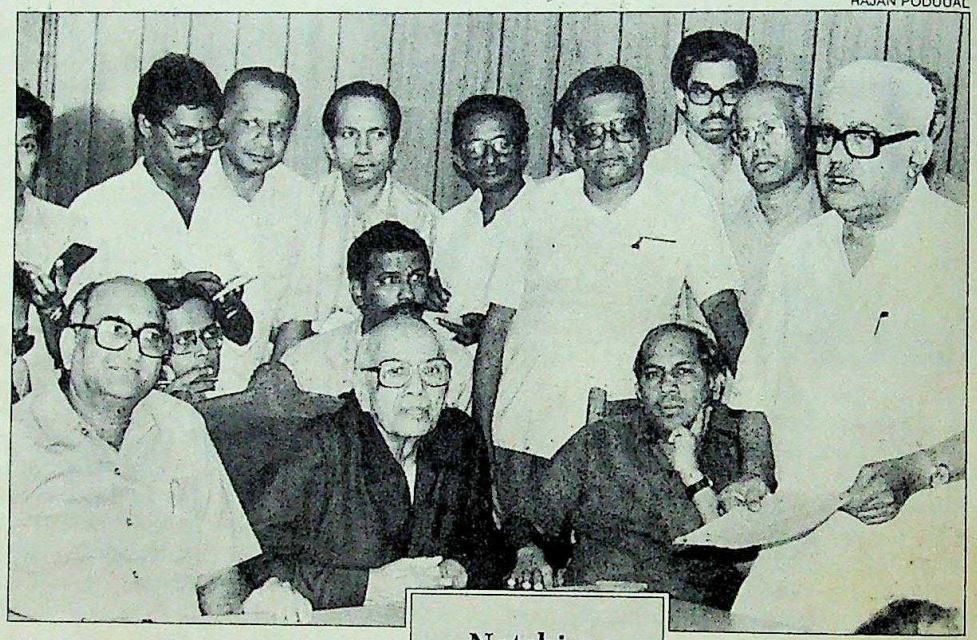
If the Marxists have been notching up one victory after another, the Opposition has been earning brickbats. Last fortnight, the Justice M.P. Menon Commission appointed to go into a controversial rice deal of the Karunakaran government indicted former food and civil supplies minister, U.A. Beeran.

What made it doubly embarrassing for the Congress(I) and its allies was the fact that this was the second time in recent weeks that a minister of the Karunakaran government was being shown in a bad light. Earlier, the Justice Sukumaran Commission appointed to go into the leakage in the tunnel of the Idukki Dam had indicted former minister for power, Balakrishna Pillai. The CPM leaders now preen themselves and murmur that none of their ministers have faced any corruption charge.

Added to all this windfall is the heavy rains. The power cuts on industries have already been brought down from 40 per cent to 20 per cent. The Congress(I) leaders can only take comfort in the emerging clouds over the state's financial position. The Marxists, however, are ebullient—they think their dream of being in power for one full term may be getting within reach.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

RAJAN PODUUAL



Nayanar (extreme right) announces the Gwalior Rayons breakthrough

Notching up one victory after another, the Marxist Government has been able to give a face-lift to its image.

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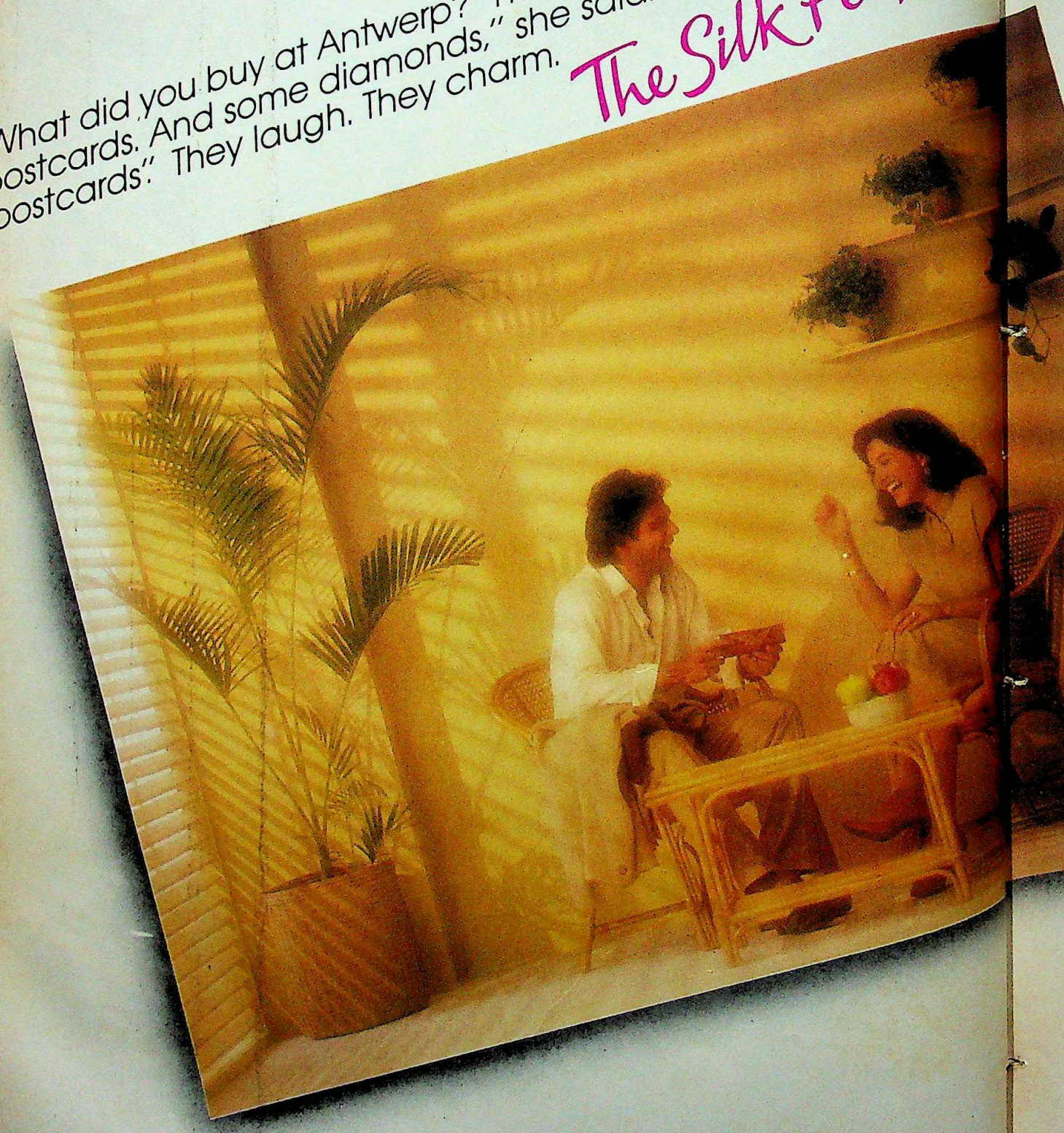
The Silk People

"What did you buy at Antwerp?" he asked. "Picture postcards. And some diamonds," she said. "Here's to the postcards." They laugh. They charm.



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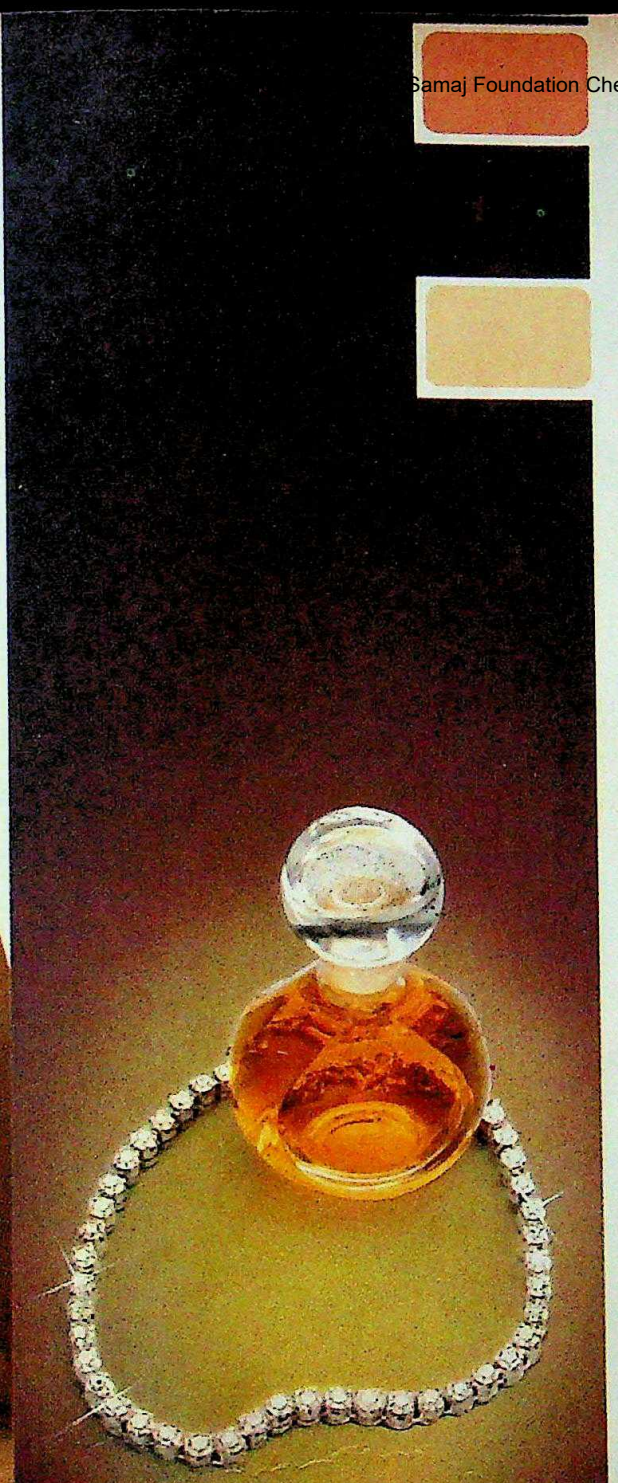

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MODI MURDER

Trial and Error

CBI's weak evidence ensures bail for Sanjay Singh

This case is a case of no evidence, my lord. The CBI now seems to have turned into the Burial Ground of Investigation.... They have made arrests without cogent proofs.

WITH another of his virtuosoic performances, celebrity lawyer Ram Jethmalani managed to virtually destroy the carefully-constructed case of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against his equally celebrated client Jan Morcha leader Sanjay Singh, 32, accused of conspiring to kill badminton ace Syed Modi. More important, the Lucknow court's own decision last fortnight to finally grant bail to Sanjay Singh further demolished the credibility of the CBI's case.

Observed Judge Achal Behari Srivastava in his order: "There is no direct or reliable circumstantial evidence to even prima facie connect the accused with the alleged crime of conspiracy to murder the deceased." A triumphant Sanjay Singh left the Lucknow District Jail on September 21 escorted by jubilant partymen. After holding a press conference, he visited the Modi residence. He met Ameeta—Modi's widow, who'd also been arrested and later released on bail—her father Madhav Kulkarni, Maharashtra State Textile Corporation's general manager (technical), and her mother Pushpalata, a former sociology lecturer at Wilson College, Bombay. "Don't worry," Sanjay Singh reassured them.

He has reason to be confident. The CBI's evidence—based largely on Ameeta's diary—at most indicates an adulterous relationship between Sanjay Singh and Ameeta. Said Jethmalani who'd flown from New York just to argue his client's bail plea: "A relationship can't establish a motive and the evidence of motive can't be evidence of crime, or conspiracy for that matter."

Further, the "confessions" of Akhilesh Singh, Jitendra Singh alias Tinku, and Amar Bahadur Singh, accused of executing the crime at Sanjay Singh's behest, are non-admissible in court as they were obtained in police custody. Even the statements of the Modis' servant, Roshan Lal, and Ameeta's mother—which the CBI used to support their theory of tension between the couple over Sanjay Singh—don't stand as evidence in court. The judge told the CBI's counsel: "Why have you been avoiding the magistracy while recording all these statements? Why couldn't you record them in the presence of a magistrate?"

In a frantic attempt to plug the gaps in their case, the CBI has extended its list of suspects to include Mohammad Alam, Sanjay Singh's personal assistant. It's now trying to establish that Alam was the person in a red Maruti car who identified Modi for the assassins. As the colour of the assailants' vehicle has changed often—it's now meant to be a white Maruti van—it's unlikely the CBI will be able to implicate Alam. Says Alam: "They told me I'd used Modi's car (a red Maruti) and was present when the murder took place." The car in question remains parked even now at Sanjay Singh's residence as the Modi house has no parking space.

A desperate CBI now says Ameeta's mother could be a conspirator. They claim to have a letter written by her in which Ameeta is told to continue her relationship with Sanjay Singh, and maintain she has admitted this in a statement. Pushpalata vehemently denies this.

Also unsubstantiated is the CBI's charge that the plot to kill Modi was hatched between Sanjay Singh and Akhilesh Singh on June 16 at Allahabad's Yatrik Hotel. The CBI's counsel couldn't present any evidence to prove this, indicating that the conspiracy theory is based on rumour and conjecture—difficult to sustain in any courtroom.

While the CBI has been unable to prove any plot to murder Modi, it's accused of being part of a political conspiracy to end Sanjay Singh's career, especially to erode his base in his home town Amethi—also the prime minister's constituency. If the CBI is indeed part of such a conspiracy, it hasn't met with much success. Instead of being condemned as a murderer, Sanjay Singh has mustered considerable support. Slogan-shouting Jan Morcha members demonstrated each time he was produced in court; on one occasion the police even had to arrest some. Most opposition leaders have also backed him. And last fortnight, V.P. Singh, who'd maintained an enigmatic silence till now, visited him in jail.

Following the court order, the CBI is in a tight spot. It has had over two months to substantiate its case and it's unlikely that new evidence will surface. In which case, the only option for the agency will be to drop the charges against the Jan Morcha leader—chalking up yet another embarrassment for Rajiv Gandhi's Government. —DILIP AWASTHI

Photographs by R.K. GUPTA

Sanjay Singh after release (right); and Jethmalani entering court

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Electric Exposure

JATIN Chakraborty, the wily Public Works Department minister of West Bengal, doesn't admit defeat easily. Recently, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu asked the acerbic Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader to quit the Cabinet if he thought the chief minister was "arrogant, biased and haughty". In anger, the minister reportedly leaked some documents to the Bengali daily, *Anand Bazar Patrika*, to prove that Basu was corrupt.

Jatin Chakraborty

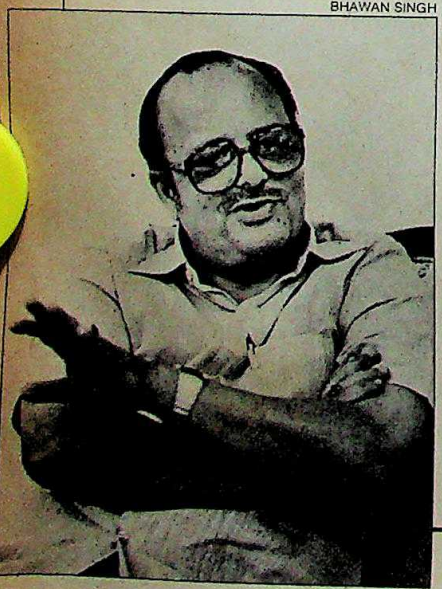
The daily front-paged notes exchanged between Basu and Chakraborty about the alleged preference shown by the Government to Bengal Electric Lamp Works Ltd in the purchase of tube lamps. In a recent letter to the managing director of the company, Chakraborty had written that he had asked the Public Works Department to place substantial orders with the company after consultations with Basu. When Basu got to know of this letter, he shot off a stern missive to Chakraborty denying that he had asked the minister to show preference to this company. Chakraborty replied that if his memory served him right, Basu had indeed asked him to do so and charged that Basu's son, Chandan—then working with the company—had approached him to plead for orders.

A cornered Basu has now asked the Left Front Chairman, Saroj Mukherjee, to take up the matter with RSP supremo, Makhan Paul. The Congress(I) couldn't have been happier. "Basu has been exposed," said state PCC(I) chief, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, demanding Basu's resignation. That may just be wishful thinking, but Basu's clean image has been sullied.

Ambiguous Appointments

MADHYA Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh apparently believes in the dictum old is gold. He has brought back as many as four superannuated chief secretaries to the state Government and given them plum postings. The latest to return to the corridors of the state secretariat is Krishna Chandra Sharma Acharya. Last month, a few weeks after he bid goodbye to the secretariat, he was appointed environment adviser to the state Government.

BHAWAN SINGH



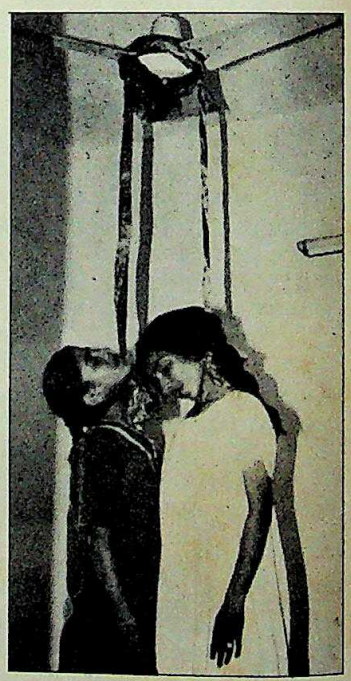
Singh: playing favourites

With vaguely described job descriptions, it is all play and no work for the chief minister's favourites. The designations, however, are impressive. For instance, Madneshwar Sharan Singh Deo, who was due for retirement last summer, now heads a public sector undertaking, Madhya Pradesh Oilfed. Another retired civil servant, Brahma Swaroop, wrangled his reappointment as chairman of the Narmada Valley Development Agency. And Gajjala Jagathpathi, who had been superannuated six years ago, has managed to cling on to power, first by getting extensions and later by getting reappointments in various 'advisory' capacities. And after Singh returned to power earlier this year, he was given the plum chairmanship of a textile plant.

Frequently, the bureaucrats who return have to work under their juniors. That, however, doesn't seem to bother them at all. Officers of the IPS are no exception. Recently, the retired head of the Intelligence Bureau in the state, M.C. Trikha, ensured that he was appointed adviser to the director-general of police. The usually feuding IAS and IPS officers do share something in common.

Macabre Suicide

The obscure town of Meghraj (population: 10,000) in north Gujarat was in the news last fortnight. The reason: unable to bear the pangs of impending separation, two nurses of the local hospital, Gita Darji and her spinster friend, Kishori Shah, both 24, ended their lives by hanging themselves from a ceiling fan in the hospital's staff quarters. It was the third lesbian relationship to surface in the state this year. Seven months ago, two women police constables of Mehsana district had declared their 'undying love' for each other. And three months later, two schoolteachers were allegedly found to be lesbians in a village near Vadodara.



Gita and Kishori

When the police began their probe in Meghraj, they found a diary containing suicide notes signed by Kishori and Gita—in which they said they did not blame anybody for their action—and two sets of letters. Close friends since they did a nursing course together at the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital, the two stayed together at Meghraj though they were allotted separate flats. In a letter to Gita, Kishori writes: "I can't live and sleep without you." The letters also reveal that Gita's husband Manoj—whom she married last February—abhorred the relationship between Gita and Kishori. Some months ago, he complained to her brother Dashrathbhai, who made Gita apply for a transfer out of Meghraj.

The incident has left macabre memories. Most of the 35 indoor patients have fled the hospital, believing it is haunted. Even the hospital's watchman has proceeded on a long leave. Admitted Medical Officer Dr P. Solanki: "We are under great psychological pressure." And even 10 days after the incident, local Adivasis were reluctant to visit the hospital.

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XXIV OLYMPIAD

EASTERN BLOC-BUSTER

IT was the ultimate showdown. Never in the 92-year history of the modern Olympic Games had such a large number (13,000) of athletes collected to decide who is the strongest and the fittest in the world. Never had so many stars been made and unmade in so short a time. And, most important of all, never had the international balance of sporting power changed so rapidly—yet decisively—in an Olympic Game. In Seoul, as performance was pitted against reputation in the first Olympics after Munich, 1972 not to suffer a boycott, one indisputable fact stood out: The US and the western world had lost their former sway over sporting prowess. The 1988 medal tally was one of the most widely distributed of all times. And the lion's share went to the Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union and the world's new sporting superpower, the German Democratic Republic.

With a total of 83 gold medals against the Western Bloc's 37 by the end of the 10th day of the Games, the Eastern Bloc proved that for the four years they'd stayed out of the Olympics—and while the Americans celebrated their 83 gold medal haul at Los Angeles—they had not wasted any time. They were ready for Seoul.

Los Angeles, 1984, had been America's games, with the Soviet Union and its allies—barring Romania—staying out. Moscow, 1980, with the US and its allies abstaining, was an Eastern Bloc show. Even before that at Montreal, in 1976, the Africans had stayed out, depriving the middle-distance running field of some of its finest competitors. This time the battle lines were clearly drawn, even if sporting powers like Cuba and North Korea stayed away. "This is the real Olympic Games.

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Soviet star Elena Chouchounova, winner of the all-round individual gymnastic title, finished with four medals

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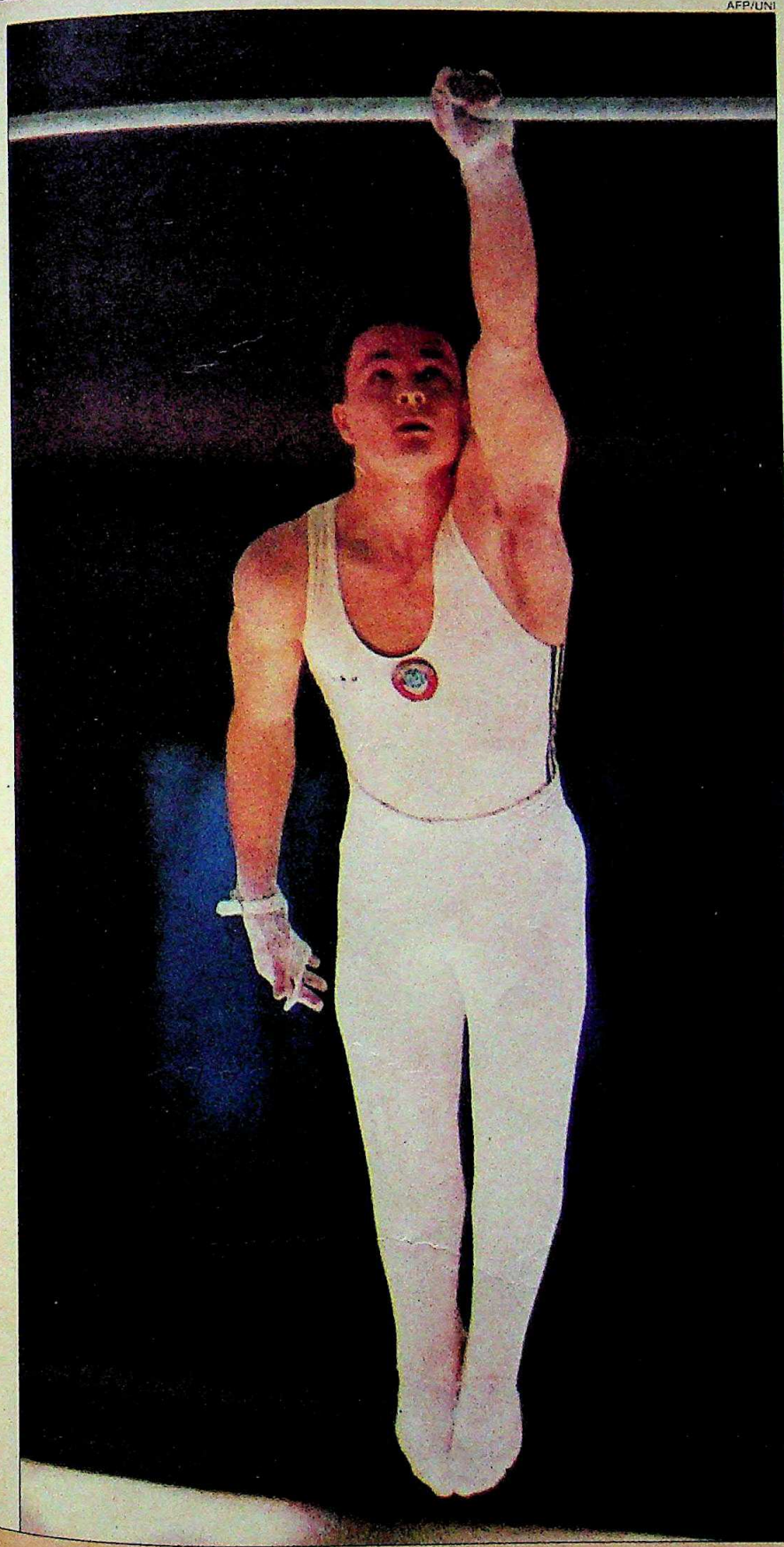
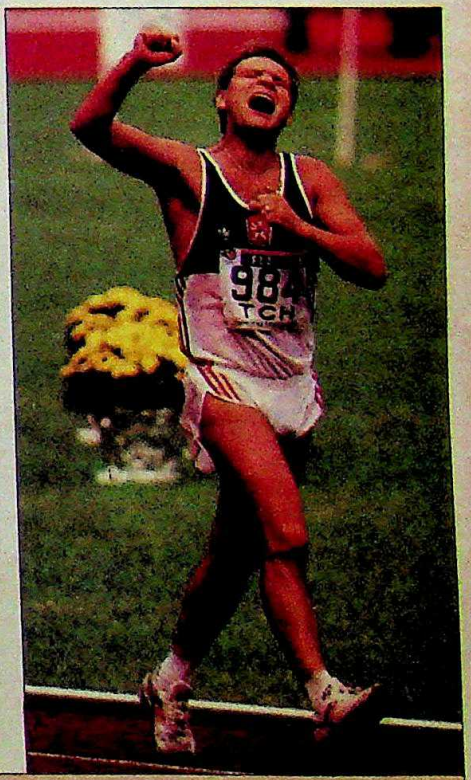


This is the real thing," conceded a US Olympic official.

Behind that note of realism lay the pain of knowing that when the real test came his team had been found wanting. In 1984, each of the 12 members of the US gymnastics team had won a medal. Now, they had won just one bronze. West German Michael Gross had to be content with just one gold. British star Steve Cram even failed to qualify for the 800 metres final. American Mary Decker-Slaney did not trip over a rival's heel this time: she just stayed yards behind nine of them. And other greats like hurdler Edwin Moses lost in the very events that had made them such legends in track history.

While some experts would conclude that the US is a sports giant which needs to be reawakened to the heady total of 107 medals in the 1968 games, others advocate the pragmatic view that athletes from other nations are striving ever so harder with equally modern techniques and, most important, with greater dedication.

Boycotts or no boycotts, international sport has now irretrievably become an extension of politics and diplomacy. Accordingly, prowess in sports has also become a symbol of power—which is just what the Soviets and their allies were looking for. Cynics played down their remarkable achievement by dismissing their performances as "stereotypes", in-



Soviet Union's Artemov swept the men's event with four golds; (right) Czechoslovakia's Josef Pribilinec won 20 km walk

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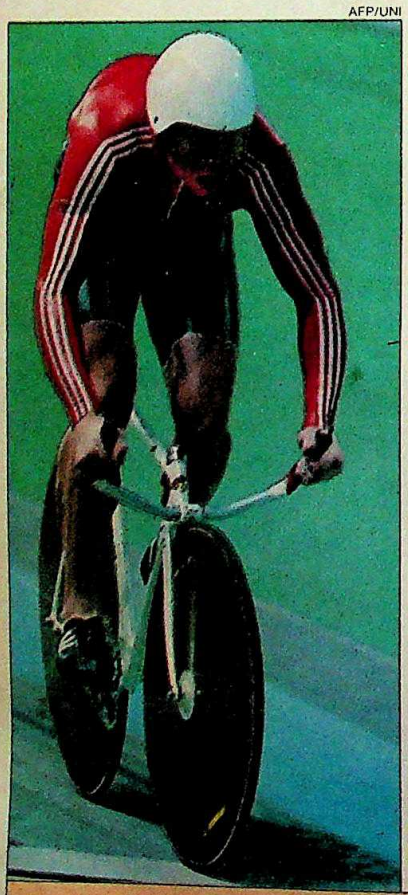
sinuating that many of them were clones, bred to perform better. But a senior Soviet coach had a riposte to that. "For 100 years, horses have been bred to perform better, yet there is no improvement in their overall performance. Human beings do better for different reasons."

The reasons could be individual glory or national pride. But there was something special about Seoul that was making competitors perform at unprecedented levels. In the swimming pool, on the track and field, in the shooting gallery and the gymnastics hall, there were athletes breaking world records or returning a series of perfect tens. Even though the rest of their team failed to live up to expectations, American sisters-in-law Jackie Joyner Kersee and Florence Griffith Joyner accomplished what, till a few years ago, the female of the human species was considered incapable of doing: achieving a score of more than 7,000 points in heptathlon and a timing of under 10.6 seconds in the 100-metres dash.

But amid the grandeur and glory, the games were not devoid of controversy, the most sensational of them obviously surrounding the biggest event of all, the Carl Lewis-Ben Johnson 100 metres duel. Two days after he sprinted his way into the athletic hall of fame with a record-breaking 9.79 seconds run, Johnson was pushed ignominiously in the chamber of shame as a post-event dope test proved that he had taken Stanazolol, a banned anabolic steroid (*see box*).

Johnson was one of the three gold medallists disqualified for drug taking. The other two were Bulgaria's "stereotype" weight-lifters whose disqualification led to their country withdrawing the entire weight-lifting team. But Johnson's by far was the most sensational case of doping in Olympic history. "It is a strange Olympics. It has given you the best records. It has also given us the worst shame," said an International Olympic Committee (IOC) official.

AFP/UNI



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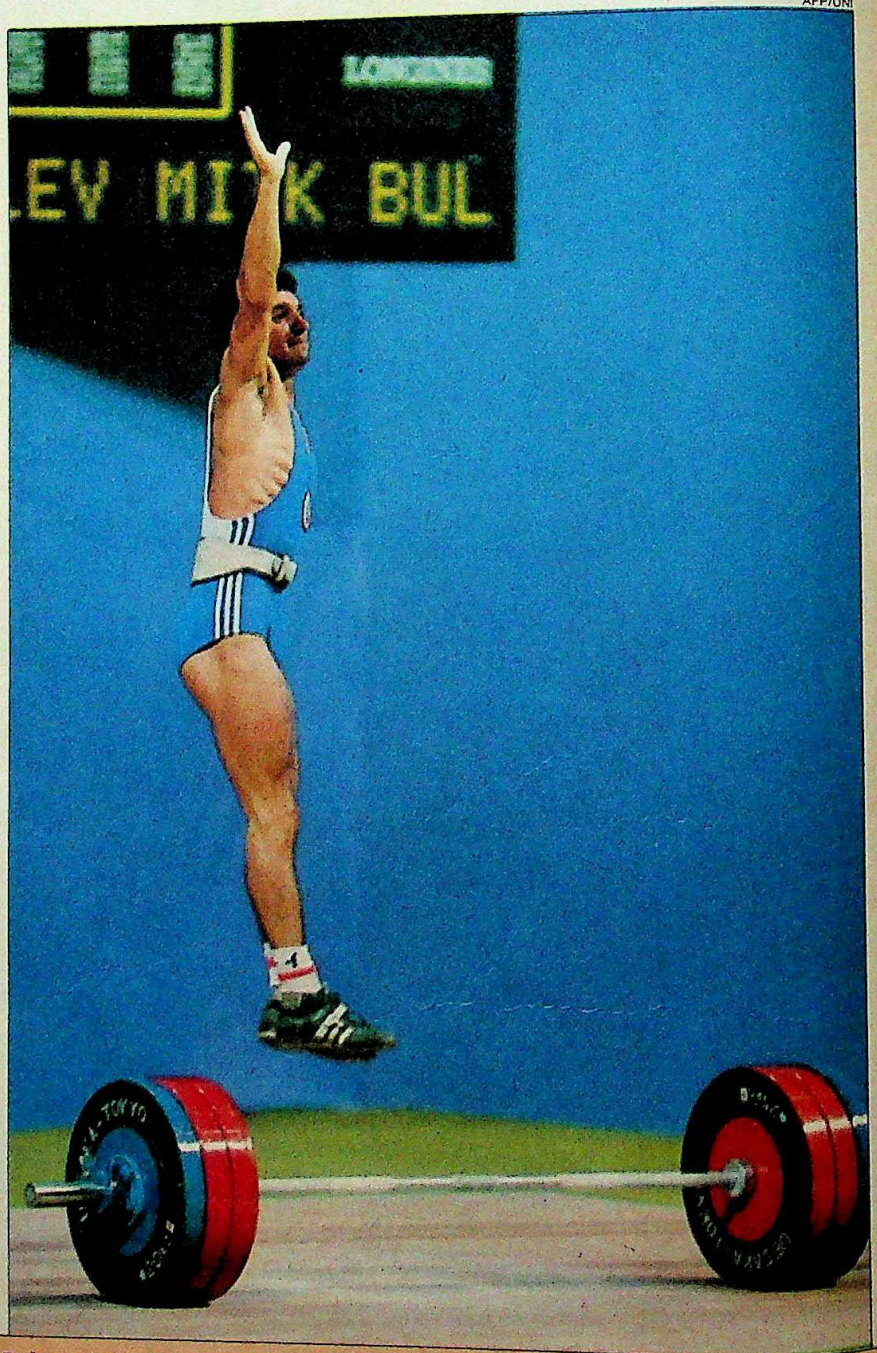

Soviet cyclist Kiritchenko wins gold (left); Bulgaria's Grablev exults at taking weight-lifting gold but is disqualified for dope-taking

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BEN JOHNSON

Olympian Scandal

As the two black superstars crouched at the starting blocks, the stakes were enormous. It was widely estimated that the winner of the sprint of the century was going to make nothing short of $5 million mainly from endorsements. The sprint was the high point of the Seoul Games.

In a casual conversation with INDIA TODAY a couple of days before the competition, Johnson had confessed that he "felt more charged and motivated than ever. Carl wasn't nice to me after my victory in Rome last year. I have to prove something to him."

Unfortunately, apart from being abnormally motivated he was also abnormally fortified. Johnson was disqualified for using a banned performance-boosting drug. He was stripped off his gold medal and put on the first flight home while Lewis was giving press conferences claiming vindication for "what I have said all along".

While the Canadian Government banned Johnson from competing for life, his coach and team officials were still trying to defend him, making veiled suggestions even of a CIA hand. Johnson himself said he suspected his favourite herbal drink had been spiked. But the IOC medical commission clearly stated that the steroid profile indicated consistent use over some time.

Immediately after the race, as the winners went in for the mandatory urine test, Johnson said he was having problems urinating. He drank a six-pack of beer and still took two-and-a-half hours urinating. IOC doping experts say they were mystified. "Maybe he thought if he got a chance of sneaking away for a leak before giving the sample, the traces of the drug would have been washed out," said an IOC doctor.

But in the cops and robbers game the IOC has played with dopers since 1968, the good doctors are believed to be ahead of the bad ones. An IOC document says that steroid doping can now be traced back five years.

It is widely acknowledged that some Eastern-Bloc countries are feeding athletes steroids in their early years to produce weight-lifting giants. By the time they compete they have given up steroids for more than five years.

The latest is the science of blood doping. It is not uncommon for an athlete to have a couple of pints of his own blood taken out and preserved a fortnight before the competition. The blood is re-transfused into the body on the eve of the competition. This immediately jacks up the red blood corpuscles count in the body which means a lot more oxygen supply. This is particularly helpful for endurance runners. The IOC doctors now say they have found tests to even counter this.

Says the IOC's Prince Alexandre de Morodo: "Doping is the biggest threat to good sports. See how it turned history's best race into the Olympics' worst controversy."—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Seoul

Ben Johnson signals victory over Carl Lewis in the 100 metres but departs in disgrace

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But the Johnson episode still failed to rob the Olympics of its glamour or its stars and, more important, the new limits of human endeavour. It is this—the attainment of new levels of excellence—that has made this Olympiad so different even for Indians disgusted with their country's performance (*see page 87*).

What is the mystique of the Olympics? What makes people from all over the world congregate every four years to do better than they had ever done before? What makes a Greg Louganis ignore a near-fatal crash on the diving board just the previous evening to post perfect scores to win the diving gold? Or what makes Russian gymnast Dmitri Bilozerchev bounce back after his leg was broken in 43 places in a car accident in 1985, to win four medals, including two golds in Seoul?

The answer came from none other than Indian tennis veteran Vijay Amritraj. "All our lives we played for prize money. In the Olympics you play for something else," he said. "The prize money is only the icing on the cake. The real cake is the Olympics."

What makes any Olympiad special is its stars. Never before in the history of the Olympics had there been such an awesome collection of stars as in Seoul. After a fortnight soaked in sweat and tears, many stars shone brighter. Others burnt out like meteors. But it was they who made Seoul so special. Their personalised rivalries were the stuff of sports-lovers' dreams.

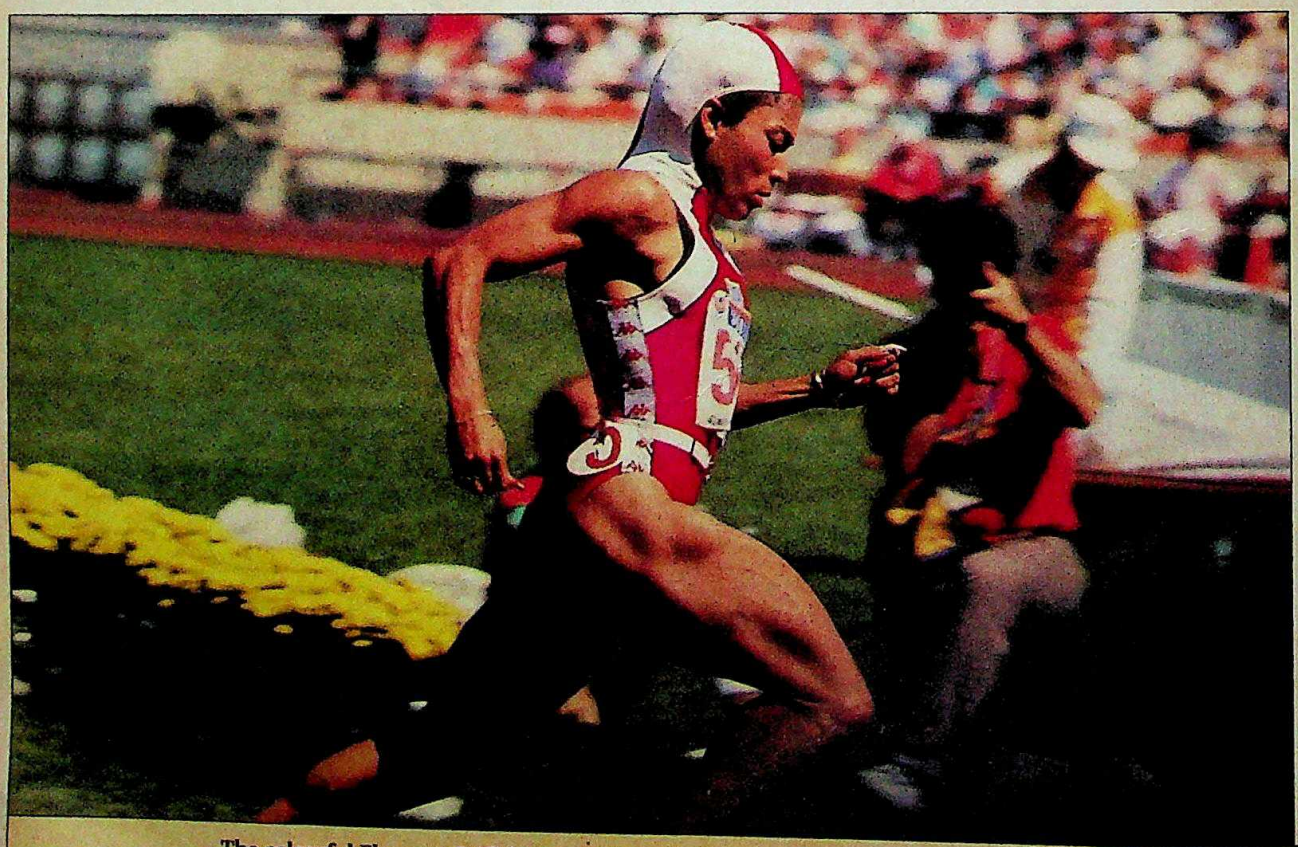
THE prima donnas did not disappoint, at least off the field. Carl Lewis arrived in Seoul escorted by 100 guards and threatened to go back if the guards did not leave him alone—yet constantly harped on the terrorist threat. A separate training area had been built for him—away from all the rest.

While the Johnson-Lewis showdown took centre-stage, at the gymnastics hall yet another rivalry was blossoming. For many months a confrontation had been building up between the Soviet Union's Elena Chouchounova (pronounced Shushunova) who at 19, is already a senior citizen in a world dominated by spunky schoolgirls, and Romanian Daniela Silivas, 17, an aspirant to Nadia Comaneci's mantle. Both had trained specially for Seoul.

Even after the first two rounds it was clear to the packed hall in Seoul that the contest was finally between the two. As they appeared and reappeared for the various exercises in the women's all round individual championship and scored one perfect ten after another, the gold for a long time could have gone either way, till Silivas just made one, minutest, slip and a Soviet judge denied her a mere 035 points. Chouchounova won at what must be her last Olympics and bent forward to kiss Silivas on the lips. It was the first time the robot-like perfectionists had betrayed any emotion at all.

The women cornered most of the attention but more golds went the way of just one Soviet man, Vladimir Artemov, who topped five events in addition to a silver. If Chouchounova had Silivas to inspire her, Artemov had team-mate Dmitri Bilozerchev. And with every competitor looking for nothing but absolute perfection it was not surprising that—for the first time in Olympic history—three men, Bilozerchev, Bulgaria's Lyubomir Gueraskov and Hungarian Zsolt Borkai were tied with 19.950 each for the pommel horse. All won golds.

If amateurism in sport has been a



The colourful Florence Griffith Joyner en route to record-breaking 100 metres run

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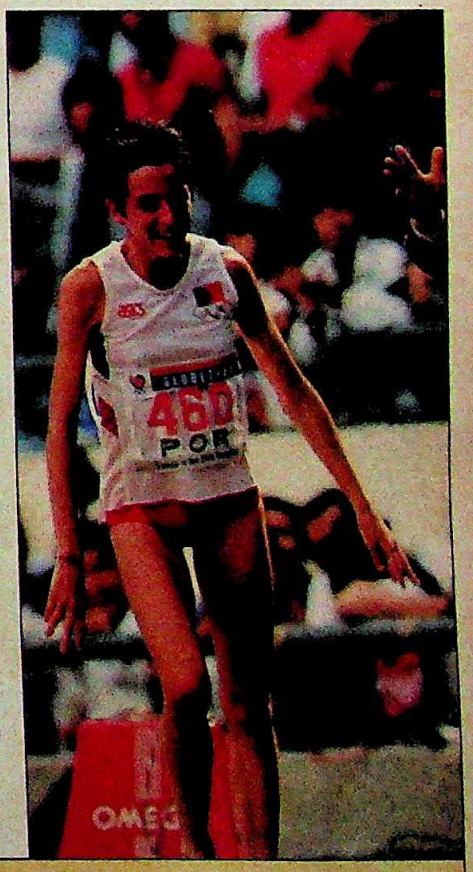
casualty of the changing times, the Olympics are only the richer for it. This year lawn tennis was included as a competition sport and, despite shin splints that kept back Boris Becker and Mats Wilander, scores of others came, including the richest stars. Among them was the greatest crowd-puller of all, West German Steffi Graf, looking so lost yet fascinated in a world she had never known before. Drawn out of her highly-protected seven-star existence, she now occupied a room with thousands of others at the Olympic athletes' village. "I have never lived like this before. It is a great experience. It also tells you all athletes are the same," she said, as she sprinted up the stands looking for a good vantage point at the athletics stadium to watch the Lewis-Johnson race.

Graf's modesty was matched by yet another teenager, fast on her way to becoming the greatest American heroine of the games. At 16, Janet Evans is already known to be the woman who beats men's swimming records. For a week, as she set the Olympic Park swimming pool ablaze, collecting three gold medals and setting a world record, specialist swimming writers talked about the need to do research on her body. "She is special. She is not human," exclaimed one. Americans hailed her as the star of their 600-strong contingent, insinuating somehow that the army of black athletes holding the US flag aloft on the track was somehow not quite as American.

The two women who saved America some face suffered from no such doubts. No matter how poor the overall American performance, this Olympiad will be remembered for their giving the world its two greatest women athletes of all times. As Jackie Joyner Kersee established herself as the greatest all round woman athlete by breaking her own heptathlon world record for the fourth time, sister-in-law Florence Griffith Joyner, or "Flo-jo" as the sprinter with ravishing looks and trendy sartorial tastes is called, ran a remarkably relaxed 100 metres, grinning all the way from the starting block to the finishing line.

Flo-jo's ebullience was more than matched by the other great athletic heroine of Seoul, marathon gold medallist Rosa Mota of Portugal whose victory was hailed as a triumph for women in Portugal's conservative society. When she used to run along her country's Atlantic coast, men would shout at her: "Woman, go home and wash socks." She remembered

AFP/UNI



Louganis injures his head but wins golds; (right) Portugal's Rosa Mota exhilarated after marathon win

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that as she strode from the victory stand to address a world-wide press conference. Asked what she wanted to do most in her moment of glory after the gruelling two-and-a-half hour run, she just said: "What I want most of all now is to go to the loo."

While old stars fought for their reputations and new ones established theirs, there were many who hogged more attention than their performances justified. The most arrogant and brashest of them all, 33-year-old American hurdler Edwin Moses, who had claimed to be the "biggest star of all", a little like "Mickey Mouse in Disneyland", was laid low to settle for the bronze in one of the biggest upsets on the track. Now, the man who had stayed outside the Olympic village on the pretext that too many fellow athletes pestered him for autographs, stood in an obscure corner of the stadium clutching his bronze and nodding meekly to the scores of disappointed fans.

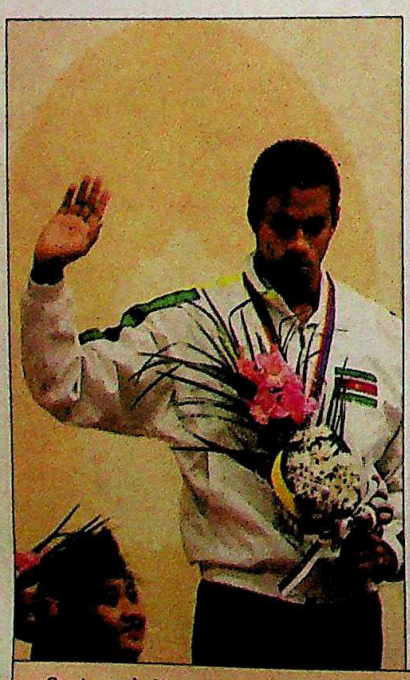
Even if their performances were poor, the Americans hogged most of the publicity, good and bad, including the shameful incident when two members of their gold-medal winning swimming team were caught stealing expensive porcelain from a discotheque. The Eastern Bloc produced its own characteristically quiet and unspectacular stars. There were of course the gymnastic wonder-girls from Soviet Union and Romania, Chouchounova and Silivas, each scoring seven perfect tens in the course of the competition. There were also the East Germans who went through the motions at the victory stand as if that too had been drilled into them as part of their training regimen.

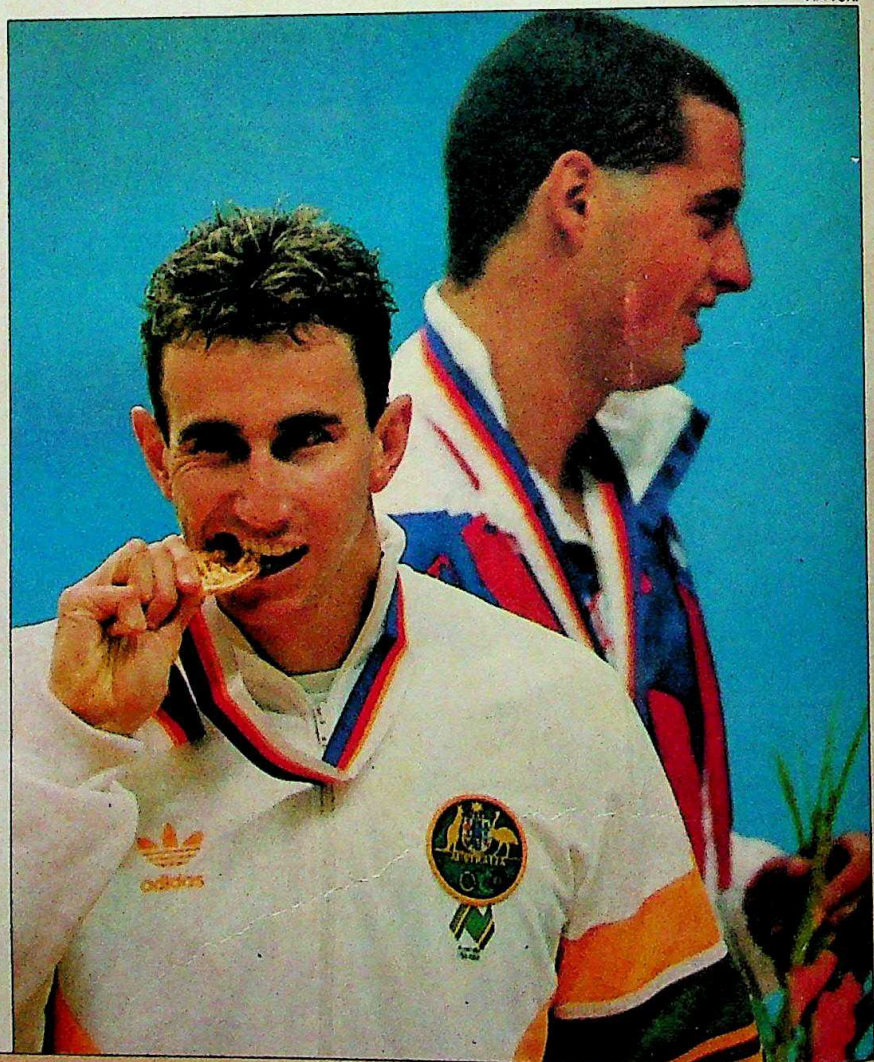
YET if there was an award for making the most eloquent star statement of the XXIVth Olympiad, the hands down winner was GDR's Kristin Otto who cornered six swimming golds. Questioned persistently on whether she felt excited at such a glorious performance, she demurred: "All the team is happy. Glory is collective. We all share it."

But one nation that firmly believes that, ultimately, the glory is theirs alone are the 4-crore Koreans. They defied fears of a boycott by some countries, terrorist threats and domestic political unrest to produce the show. Now they were basking in its sunshine and teaching the world, through the Olympics, their ancient philosophy of *yin* and *yang* which was also the theme underlying the spectacular opening ceremony.

But the jingoism also boomeranged at times. In the surcharged atmosphere, few Koreans had the realism to understand that the Olympics are very different from the Asiad, and there was no way the Koreans could have repeated their 1986 medal sweep. "We have been spoilt by Asiad '86. People want us to win everything," said an official of the Korean contingent. It was because of such emotional pressure that Korean coaches invaded the ring and thrashed the New Zealand referee who had just supervised the bantamweight bout which a Korean boxer lost to a Bulgarian. The incident resulted in the resignation of Korean Olympic

AFP/UNI





Surinam's Nesty wins surprise gold in 100 metres butterfly; (right) Australia's Armstrong tests his after beating Biondi

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Committee President, Kon Chong-ha.

For the Seoul Olympic Organising Committee (SLOOC), the consolation was that the security had been perfect except for a few demonstrations downtown and a badly-aimed molotov cocktail that had missed the sacred flame by miles at the opening ceremony.

With the people and the Government so keen to please, complaints about minor irritants such as less knowledge of English would be needless nit-picking. Organising any such extravaganza is an Olympian task. In the context of international terrorism and intrigue it was an even greater challenge. The Koreans believe, and justifiably that they have done as good a job of organising the first full Olympics in 16 years as any developed nation could have done. Says Seh Park, the SLOOC president: "We've kept our promise to the world. This was a remarkable feat though, of course, we had help from the whole world."

More than anything else, the whole world will remember Seoul as the city that produced what is already being called the greatest Olympiad ever, both in terms of the organisational grandeur and performing standards. After a decade and a half of controversy that put the very future of the Olympic Games in the shade, Seoul has produced a sporting spectacular that, for all its controversies and doping scandals, did reach Olympian heights.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Seoul

INDIA

Shame at Seoul

Defeat and recriminations all the way

THE images were all too familiar. There were the athletes ejected in the preliminary rounds, their faces crumpled in dismay. There was the hockey team dejectedly leaving the Songnam Stadium. There were the boxers and weight-lifters, clearly incapable of measuring up to the competition. And there were the usual reverberations of discord, mismanagement and controversy in yet another medalless Indian Olympic contingent.

While other teams perfected their techniques and pored over video replays of rivals' performances and tactics, ironing out the slightest of weaknesses that makes all the difference between winners and also rans, the Indian contingent members were busy finding scapegoats, stabbing each other in the back and compounding the disgrace.

The most disgraceful, obviously, were the shenanigans that made the athletic squad the laughing-stock of the entire Olympic village. First of all, P.T. Usha finished a distant last in the heat for the 400 metres hurdles with her career's worst timing of 59.55 seconds and collapsed in tears. Then her coach O.M. Nambiar insisted that Usha, despite her painful heel, would still anchor the 4 × 400 metres relay in place of Vandana Rao.

The obvious result was confrontation. Rao protested against such a move and was promptly asked to run a trial with Usha. She refused to do that despite Chef de Mission K.P. Singh Deo's threat to send her to India on the next available flight. "We have told Mr Singh Deo if she goes back, all of us go back as well," said another member of the relay team less than 24 hours before the event was to begin. With all four decision-makers—relay coach Gnanasekharan, Nambiar, Singh Deo and Amateur Athletic Federation chief Suresh Kalmadi—unable to decide what to do, confusion and resentment reigned in the Indian camp. "Here we can't even respect ourselves as human beings. And you expect us to win medals?" complained an athlete.

Unfortunately for the Indian camp, the athletic controversy came close on the heels of another disastrous happening on the field after Usha's demoralising fade-out: the hockey team's defeat against Great Britain just after they had rekindled hopes with victories against South Korea

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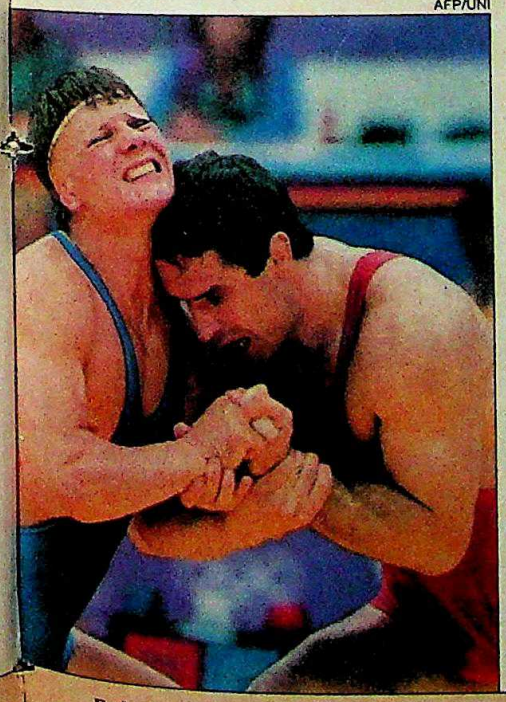

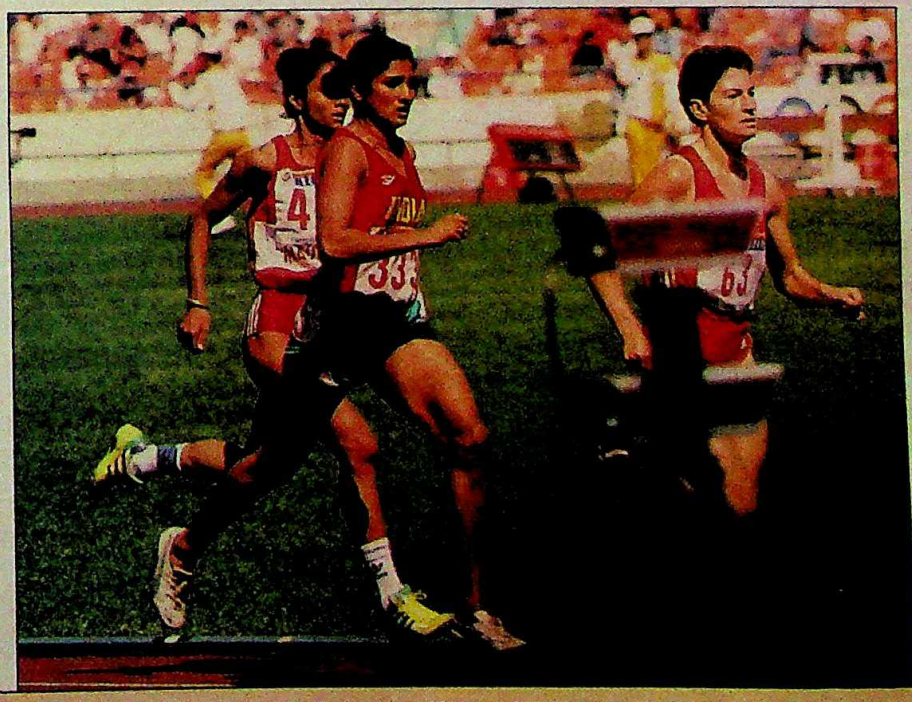

Bulgarian wrestler Atanas Komchev (right) gold medallist in the 90 kg event; Shiny Abraham trailing in the 800 metres

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and Canada. "We were so sure of a medal this time. But we never click at the right moment," said a distraught player. For Minister of State for Sports Margaret Alva, who had extended her stay in Seoul to watch the hoped for hockey victory, disappointment was even greater as the athletics disaster was also bound to be laid at her door. The Government had overruled the athletics federation in sending the athletes to Seoul.

Nothing, however, rankled more than the hockey defeat. For the jingoists, the fact that Pakistan fell by the wayside could provide some perverse comfort. But it was evident that despite the best preparations and motivation, Asian hockey had failed to come to terms with the western challenge. "Earlier these people had strength, now they also have skill. They have got our measure," said Malaysian hockey umpire Vijaynathan.

With a creditable draw against West Germany and victory against South Korea, the team had shown signs of recovery after losing to the Soviets. A win or even a draw against Great Britain would have meant a place in the semi-finals.

That was not to be as India played for a draw rather than victory, crowding their defence and negating the very basis of traditional subcontinental hockey. What they forgot was that no defence is impregnable to an attack led by unemployed Surrey jeweller Sean Kerly who cut through again and again and scored a brilliant field goal to seal India's fate. "The better team won," conceded captain Somayya. Manager Jhaman Lal Sharma complained about umpiring, perhaps with some justification. But there was no denying that, despite a year of preparations, Indian hockey had failed to sort out its basic problems.

As it always happens, this defeat too will lead to more post-mortems. The optimists played down the disasters saying that both India and Pakistan had performed much better than expected. At the Willesden World Cup the teams had taken the last two spots among 12 and even at Seoul India was seeded second from the bottom, above only the lowly Kenyans who ended up conceding 24 goals in five preliminary matches. Even Somayya said that if anything, the two teams had shown signs of a come-back.

But that is at best a loser's optimism. Time and again, the league matches showed that the Indian-style hockey cannot meet the challenge of the modern, fast-moving game on artificial surfaces especially because of the changed rules that mainly benefit the western style. Immediately after the India-Great Britain match was over Ashwani Kumar, former Indian hockey supremo and now a member of the IOC, indignantly confronted Alva and said: "Madam you and our government, is responsible for this state of Indian hockey. In 1976 I had said we have to get foreign coaches for artificial surfaces. Everyone laughed at me. Today you see the result."

Kumar's argument is that modern hockey is very different from what our coaches had played in their heyday. He said: "Look at these boys. Individually they are as good as any we had. In fact, it is surprising that despite the decline the basic quality of available talent has not gone down. They only need better handling." It was hardly surprising that after the match Indian officials were approached by the West Germans who offered a coach on loan for a year.

Just a few yards away, Alva was discussing yet another coaching proposition with famous Kenyan middle-distance runner Kip Keino who has offered to come to India—at a price. "I'm working on it," said Alva. But for the moment, she had too much on her mind to think of the future. For her, the greatest embarrassment was Usha's performance.

Indian hockey team play the Soviets and then fade out; (right) Amritraj serving against Leconte and bowing out in the first round

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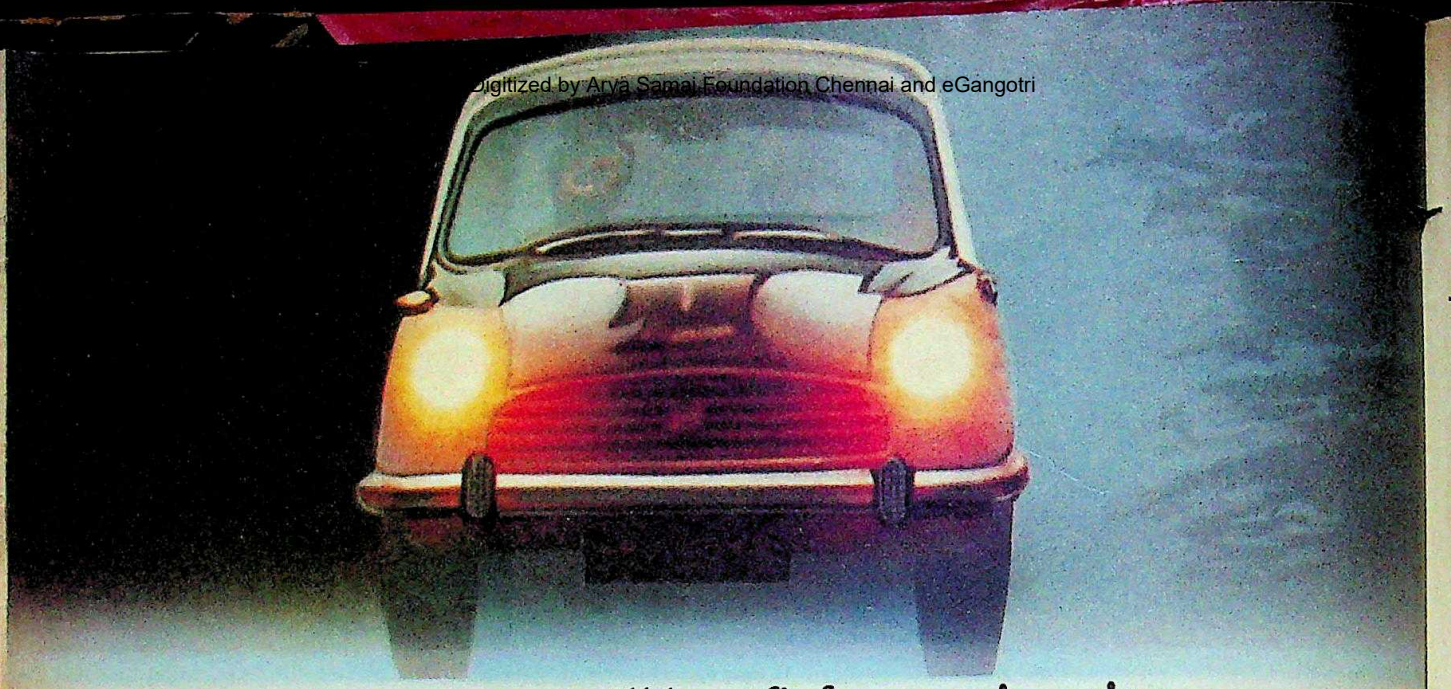

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Running her favourite event for the first time in 1988, Usha seemed to be abreast with the field for the first 100 yards and then merely managed to hobble up to the finishing line. "It wasn't my best day," she said. Given her state of fitness and lack of training this year, the performance should not have been such a surprise though she could put some of the blame on the timing of the event. Even the press centre's computers, that spewed out daily biorhythm charts for each athlete at inquisitive newsmen's commands, had given a premonition of the disaster. Emotionally, physically and even intellectually, Usha's graph was at its rock bottom on September 25, showing signs of picking up only after October 2, the day the games end.

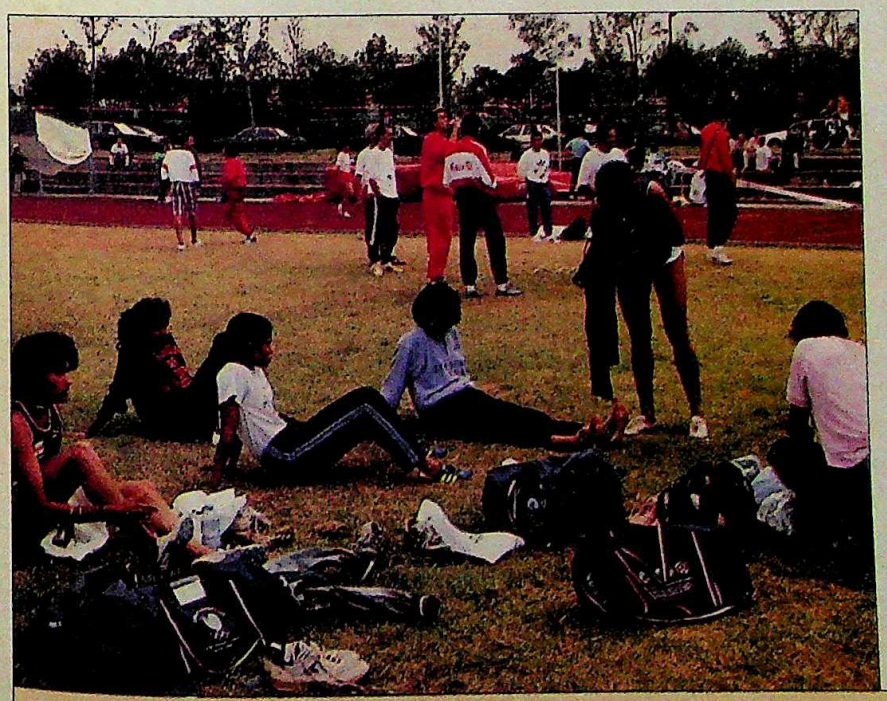
Biorhythms were not working much better anywhere else either, except perhaps in the case of the never-say-retire Vijay Amritraj who came close to causing the biggest upset on the lawn tennis centre court. His languorous grace of old times was in evidence as he coolly led French champion Henri Leconte on the road to a first round exit. But as has been the story of his 15-year career, Vijay faltered on the brink of victory. "I had thought about my previous matches with Henri. I had drawn a game plan which worked well. And I did nothing wrong. But he pulled off some great shots," Vijay conceded later. He lasted two more rounds in the doubles along with brother Anand and spent the rest of his stay as a happy tourist, going around taking pictures with his autofocus camera, his jacket adorned with at least two dozen commemorative Olympic pins.

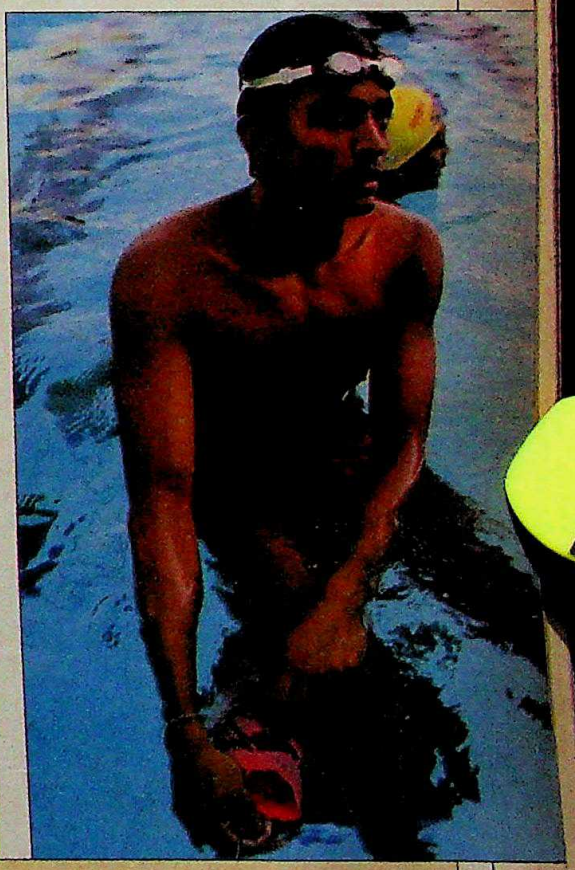
NOW in the twilight of his remarkable career, Vijay perhaps deserved to bask under the Seoul sun through the Games. But not so the scores of Indian officials, most of them small-time politicians or bureaucrats who descended on Seoul, waking up embassy and Indian Olympic Association officials in the middle of the night asking for accommodation and passes. "The Koreans are an understanding people," said an Indian official. "They have even started a category of passes called extra-official."

At every hockey match and in the evenings at Itaewon, Seoul's sunset strip, scores of Indian officials could be seen gallivanting around with their credentials round their necks. Many shared rooms in the Olympic village, others hunted for cheap accommodation in *Yogwans*, the family-run traditional Korean lodges. Some even begged journalists to let them share rooms in the press village. None had succeeded in the mission that had supposedly brought them here: getting elected to international bodies of their respective sports.

Worse, each time an Indian performed badly, the officials went around making I-told-you-so statements. Dilip Mitra, the swimming federation chief who was loudly explaining to people how crucial it was for him to return via Hong Kong as he had to buy "a lot of perfume", was visibly jubilant after the poor performance of Khazan Singh, the swimmer selected despite the federation's opposition. The mismanagement was exemplified by the problem over the two cooks who had been brought from Delhi to give the contingent *desi* food. No one had realised that such cooking ventures are not allowed in the Olympic village. The two thus sat in the basement of the Indian Embassy, cooking once every two evenings while the contingent was driven from the village, 18 km away, for a taste of curry and *sambar*.

Overall, this Olympiad was an even more soul-shattering experience than Los Angeles for India. Then at least there had been the joy of Usha's performance, and a new hope. Today that lies buried under piles of confetti and record sheets at the colourful Chamshil sports complex. —SHEKHAR GUPTA in Seoul





Women's relay team relax after practice; (right) swimmer Khazan Singh disappoints

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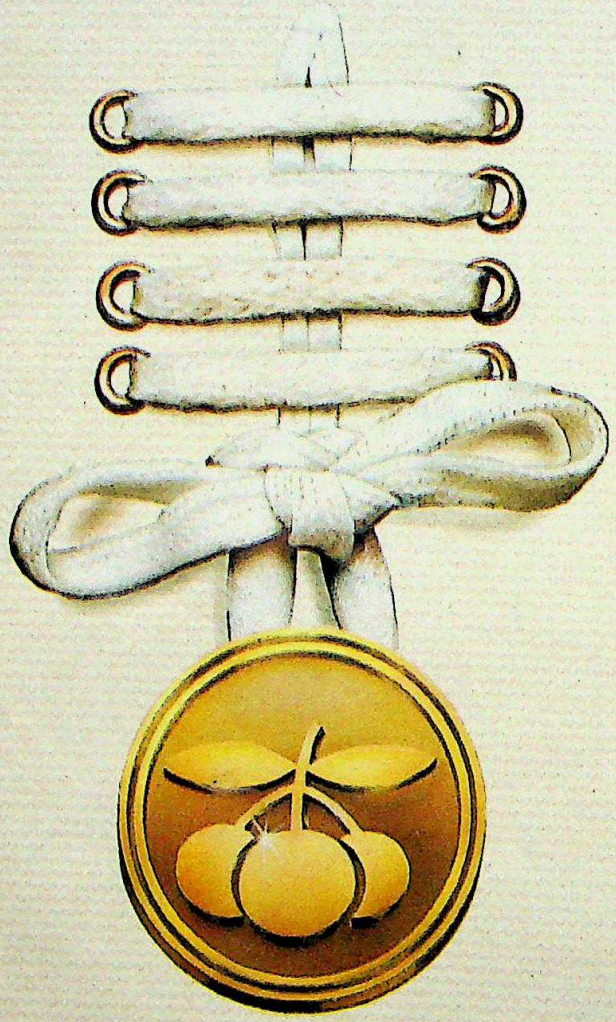

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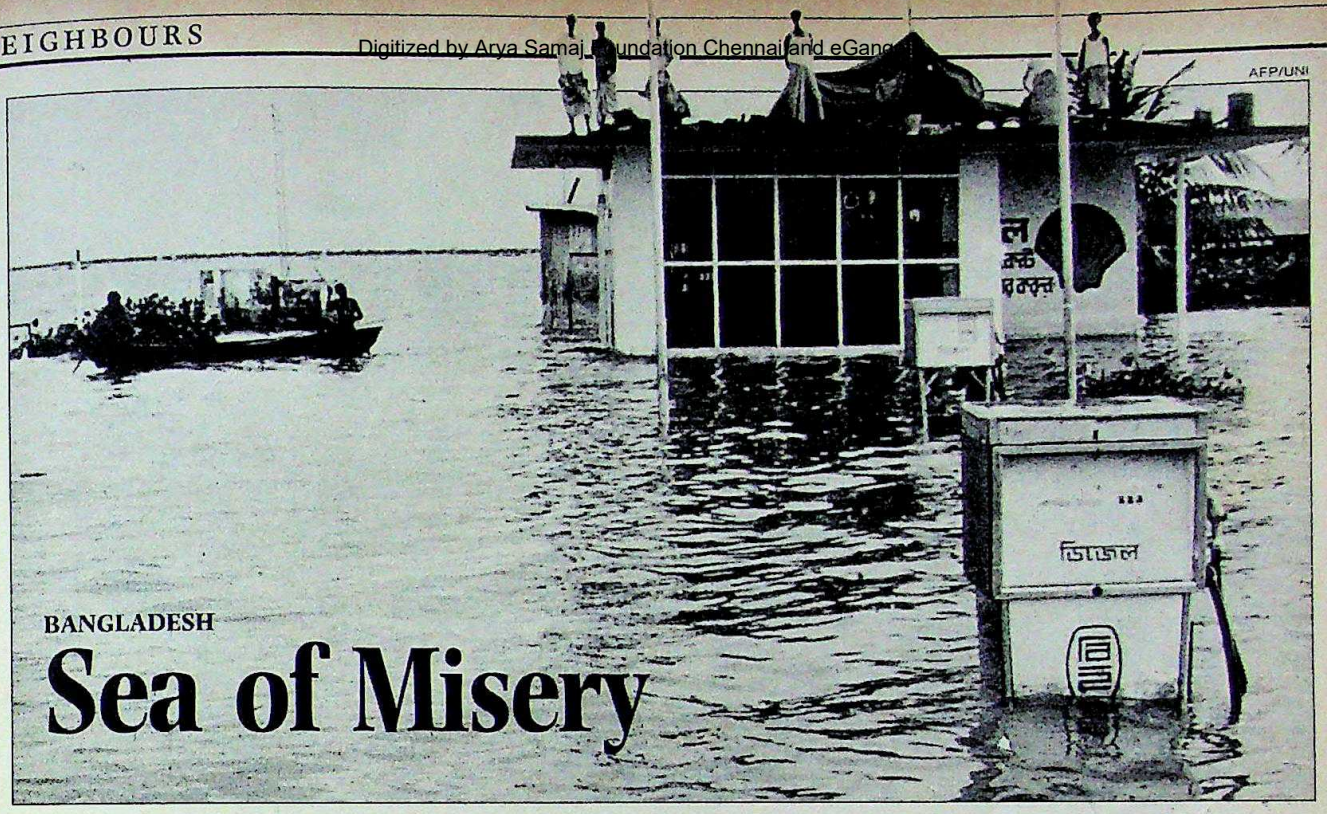
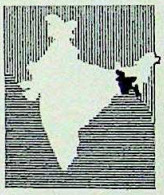


BANGLADESH

Sea of Misery



NATURE seems to have put a curse on Bangladesh. The world's perennial basket case seems to be struggling through one natural disaster after another. But this time, the floods that engulfed the country seemed to have an unprecedented ferocity. A deltaic country formed through centuries of siltation by the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna—one of the world's mighty river systems—Bangladesh's very existence was threatened by these rivers.

Days of heavy late monsoon rains in the sub-Himalayan foothills and elsewhere overflowed the 230 rivers that run through the country, 57 of which have their origins in India, transforming Bangladesh into a vast lake with only roof-tops, tree-tops and isolated farmsteads visible on the surface.

Floods are an annual pestilence in Bangladesh but this year's were unlike any in the past. The loss is incalculable. Not only has the country's entire economy been shattered but there has been capital losses due to total destruction of the existing infrastructure. Officially, 2,000 people have died of starvation, drowning and snake bites and another 400 have succumbed to diarrhoea, dysentery and other water-borne diseases which have threatened to break out in epidemic form. Scarcity of safe drinking water has led to over 15 lakh people becoming victims of various water-borne diseases. "Our biggest headache is to prevent the outbreak of any epidemic," says Manzoor Ul Karim, secretary to the Ministry of Health.

But that is hardly the main concern. The backbone of the country's economy—agriculture and the jute industry—has been battered out of shape. Crops in over 10 lakh hectares have been completely lost and to add to the misery jute price have crashed. A quarter of the country's 110 million people have been rendered homeless. The full extent of the devastation will, however, be known only after the waters have receded and communication is resorted.

The flood waters have damaged or destroyed over 79,000 km of roads, 700 km of rail lines, 150 bridges and 450 km of river embankments. Besides damage to various government buildings all over the country, most educational institutions have suffered major flood and post-flood damage.

The Ershad Government, however, realised the severity of the floods only after the Buriganga, a tributary of the Ganga, broke its embankments and engulfed 75 per cent of the capital, Dhaka. The Zia International Airport was flooded and all links with the outside world were cut off for nearly a week. All major road and rail connections from Dhaka to Chittagaon, Tangail, Khulna Aricha and Sylhet were rendered inoperative. Water even threatened to inundate the Chittagaon hills and the Government was forced to open the floodgates of the Kaptai Dam to prevent flooding of Chittagaon port.

Flood scene in Dhaka: unprecedented

Ershad's sos to the international community brought a welcome deluge. The first to respond to Bangladesh's distress call was India. A batch of four Mi8 air force helicopters were sent to Bangladesh for air-dropping food packets to the stranded population. Other forms of aid arrived from all over the world in plane-loads. "The process of rebuilding is not possible without international support," says Amjad Hossain Khan, chairman, Water Development Board and an acknowledged expert on water management.

Though the flood waters had started receding from Dhaka by last week, normalcy is still a long way off. Over 2 lakh people have taken shelter in nearly 400 camps in the Dhaka area. President Ershad has come under considerable criticism from opposition parties which have condemned him for exploiting human misery in order to boost his political career by hogging all the publicity. Bangladesh television news featured Ershad or his wife engaged in relief work and receiving donations and dignitaries for 95 per cent of the news time.

Though the floods themselves were unprecedented, what added to the magnitude of the disaster is the lack of

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AFP/UNI

scientific planning of waterways. A government spokesman said that the country spends only 2 crore Taka (approximately Rs 92 lakh) for dredging rivers every year. In fact, it spends just 1 crore Taka (Rs 46 lakh) for 94 per cent of its waterways because the Indian Government pays another 1 crore Taka to Bangladesh for dredging the two waterways on the Brahmaputra and Khustua which it uses.

The Opposition was quick to point out the Ershad Government's lapses. "There is a criminal neglect of priorities," charged Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina Wajed. "Ershad has got modern cars, buses and impressive buildings for his army and other officials but not a single dredger for desiltation of rivers." In fact, nearly one-third of the national budget of 3,788 crore Taka is spent on general administration and defence.

Ershad has also used the disaster to exploit anti-Indian sentiments in Bangladesh. The common man has been made to believe that the floods were caused by India which opened the floodgates of its Farakka Barrage on the Ganges in West Bengal. "Where is the water coming from?" Ershad makes a point of asking at every public meeting. Says an Indian diplomat: "It suits every political party in Bangladesh to be hostile towards India." That was given a further fillip by Ershad's sudden decision to send the Indian helicopters back the moment other helicopters arrived from Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

New Delhi reacted sharply to the move and, as a conciliatory gesture, Ershad announced that he would visit India to discuss the situation. But it was obvious that Ershad was using the anti-India ploy to divert attention from his own failures. Both the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have warned Bangladesh of dire consequences if steps were not taken to correct the following problems:

- ▶ Unplanned and unscientific construction of bandhs and embankments.
- ▶ Complete neglect of waterways which led to siltation.
- ▶ Population intervention on embankments.
- ▶ Under-utilisation of flood control and disaster warning infrastructure.
- ▶ Lack of maintenance of the existing infrastructures.
- ▶ No dredging and absence of a centralised authority to coordinate drainage systems.

Flood victims line up for relief (above): and Ershad: dangerous neglect

Moreover, 59 per cent of the country is flood-prone because it is only four to five metres above sea level. Some areas, like those in Sylhet, are at sea level and serve as a bowl whenever there are floods. In fact, Amjad Hossain Khan admits that the Farakka Barrage has reduced the inflow of water into Bangladesh by 39,200 cusecs. "I do not blame India for the floods because even if the Farakka Barrage would not have been there, we would have been flooded. What is needed is the formation of a strategy to include water reservoirs for checking such occurrences," he says.

The floods have abated, but the hospitals are choked with patients who have even occupied the corridors and any available open space. To overcome the impending food crisis, the Bangladesh Government will require another massive dose of foreign aid and seeds to re-plant the submerged agricultural areas. Bangladesh's agony may have just begun. —KAMALJEET RATTAN in Dhaka

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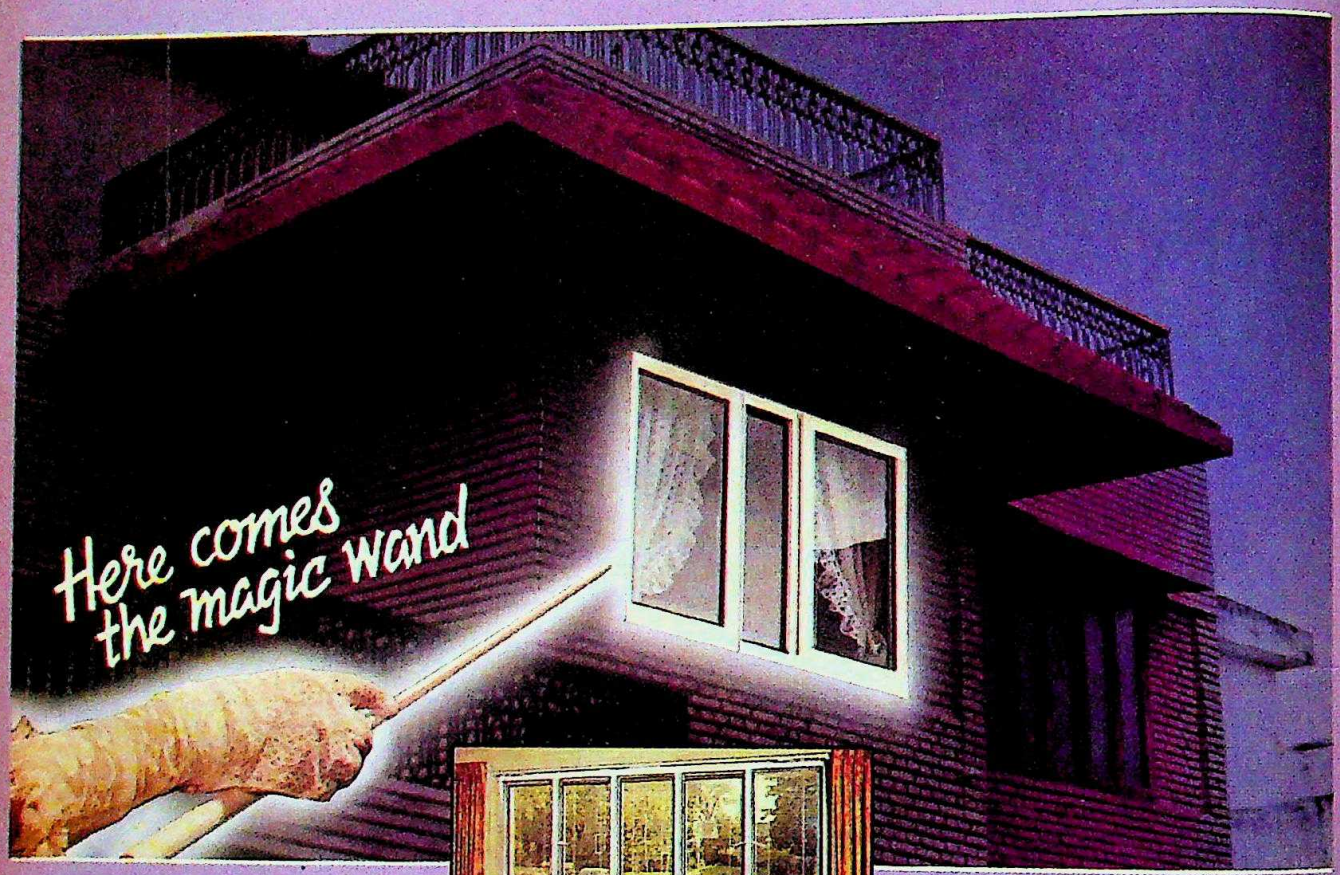

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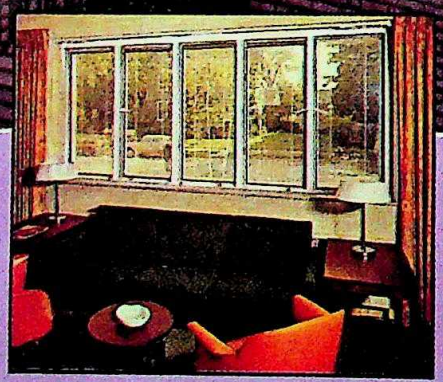

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FRESH RACE

A keen race to bag two major petrochemical projects is wide open again, after the Government's virtual decision on two winners. The projects in question are the linear alkyl benzene (LAB) ventures to be set up in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The Government is to give licences to make LAB, a raw material for synthetic detergents. Four front runners emerged from the crowd of corporations in the run for these licences: Nirma Chemical Works, Hindustan Lever, Straw Products (part of the JK group of companies), and Aditya Birla's Grasim Industries. After much deliberation, the Government plumped for Nirma and Lever (both make soap). But roughly a fortnight ago, a rival protested to the prime minister that the decision was unfair. According to the grape-vine, the Government has called for a review of the decision.

BRITISH ENTRY

BOOKER Health Foods, part of the British food and agricultural business conglomerate that sponsors the annual Booker prize for fiction, is entering the Indian market. A group of professionals and the Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation (RIICO) have floated British Health Products (India) in partnership with Booker to launch, initially, a range of undisclosed health foods and, later, health and weight-related products. Industrialist Raunaq Singh initiated the project, but it is being implemented by a team of professionals. Booker has 40 per cent stake in the new company's small equity base (Rs 1.40 crore). A few investment companies are chipping in too, but most of the cash has come from RIICO. The Government cleared the Rajasthan-based venture last February, on condition that it export 15 per cent of its output after going on stream next January. Right now, the country's health foods market is minuscule (in the region of Rs 5 crore). But the project's promoters are convinced that they can establish a beach-head in the nascent market.

EXPANDING CAPACITY

THE Rs 1,080-crore Cochin Refineries, which the Central and Kerala governments and Phillips Petroleum Company of the US promoted 25 years ago, is seeking government permission to expand production capacities from 4.5 million tonnes a year to 6 million tonnes, and to move into LAB and a range of other petrochemical wares. The Government is still considering the proposals. Meanwhile, Phillips, which has been pulling out from its overseas enterprises, has put up for sale its 18.94 per cent stake in Cochin Refineries. The financial institutions will pick up 25 per cent of the foreign shareholding, employees another 5 per cent, but the remainder (worth roughly Rs 1.70 crore) is to be offered to the public.

TRIMMING THE FLAB

THE state-owned National Textile Corporation (NTC) plans to trim its flab. The losing textile company hopes to get rid of almost 10 per cent of its work-force. The employees will become surplus as a result of NTC's plans to amalgamate a number of its sick units. NTC will therefore offer nearly 20,000 employees a flat sum of cash or a pension to induce them to quit. It hopes to recover the Rs 200 crore that the voluntary retirement scheme will cost it, by selling land that will become surplus as a result of the mergers.

TOPPING THE LIST

THE Tatas have raced ahead of the Birlas in terms of assets to emerge as the largest business house in the country. According to a *Business Standard* study, the Tatas had assets worth Rs 4,348 crore in 1986 against the Birlas' Rs 4,606 crore. But in 1987, the figures went up to Rs 4,934 crore and Rs 4,775 crore, respectively (*see chart*). In both the years, however, the Tatas remained ahead of the Birlas in terms of

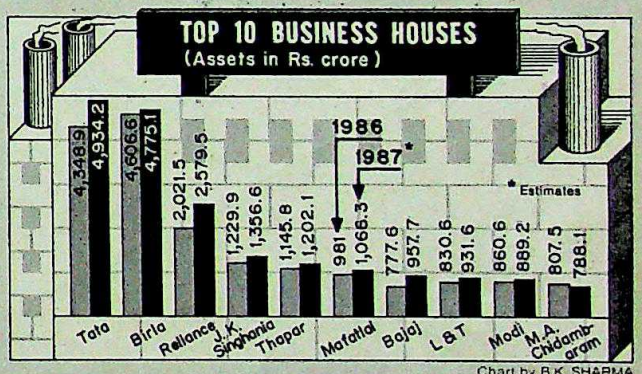

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

sales. On the basis of government data, the study also notes that three companies or groups stood out from the crowd: Hindustan Lever, Reliance Industries and—surprisingly—the Modis. Lever's assets grew by almost 30 per cent, Reliance's sales by 40 per cent and the Modi group's profits by 609 per cent. The Modi profit performance, however, is not as impressive as the percentage suggests: profits shot up from a low base of Rs 4 crore to Rs 28 crore.

BOOSTING EXPORTS

FOREIGN software export ventures will soon receive a shot in the arm with the Government setting up "software parks" for them. Land has been acquired in Pune for the first park, and more are expected to be established elsewhere. The move follows the rush by several overseas concerns to India to set up software export projects. The latest to do so is Westinghouse of the US, which is investing in 39.9 per cent of the equity of WBI Advanced Technology, a software company to be established at Conoor in Tamil Nadu in partnership with the Tatas. Texas Instruments has already set up shop at Bangalore to export software via satellite. The Government's software export target of Rs 300 crore by 1989-90 does not, therefore, seem as chimerical as it once used to. Software exports this year may touch Rs 144 crore, and government officials feel the Rs 300-crore goal is within reach.

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THE TATAS

Transfer of Power

The Tata Empire is going through a period of transition amidst expansion

FOR months now, there has been talk of transition in the house of Tatas. At least one of its powerful company heads is stepping down, another surprisingly announced his retirement a few months ago after a newspaper report queered any chances he had of bagging his colleague's job, while a third may be elevated as chairman of the company where he's now managing director.

And as India's largest business house embarks on a massive drive to modernise and expand, more than one Tata director talks of the need for a strong corporate centre. After years of operating as a loose confederation of companies, with powerful independent professionals at the helm, this clearly suggests that an era is drawing to a close for the Tatas.

So do other events. J.R.D. Tata, the group's venerable head, is continuing the

J.R.D. TATA

"Tatas won't break up after me"

At 84, Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy ("JRD") Tata has lost none of the qualities that have made him a legendary public figure. Along with a sharp intellect and a gift for synthesising, comes a gentle wit and an exceptional old-world grace. At his fourth-floor office at Bombay House, the heart of the sprawling Tata empire, the chairman of Tata Sons spoke forcefully to Bureau Chief M. RAHMAN *on the future of India's largest business house, the country's burgeoning bureaucracy, and the tardy pace of technological progress. Excerpts from the hour-long interview:*

Q. *Is it true that you now plan to step down as chairman of Indian Hotels Company?*

A. A stage is reached in a man's life when his effectiveness is bound to be affected by age and the need for change. When you reach the age of 84, and a company has a strong management, sooner or later you should hand over. I've done it all along—in Telco, in Tisco, in Tata Chemicals. In well-run companies, succession should be created in advance.

Q. *But there is some anxiety within the organisation that without a common chairman for the major Tata companies, the group may break up eventually.*

A. Common chairmanship was important till 1970, when the managing agency system was abolished. Once the management of companies was compulsorily separated, what has kept Tata companies together is the acceptance that ours is a good and honest organisation, and also the realisation that each company gains from being a member of the Tata group. This feeling has percolated down to the workers.

The company chairman's responsibility is a high one, and should be carried by the people who run it. I have handed over chairmanships all along, but up to now not one company has broken away from the group. The realisation is there particularly among the larger companies that being part of the Tata group gives strength and has a synergic influence. But I'm quite optimistic that the Tata group won't break up after me. I have tried to ensure by upholding the traditions set by Jamshedji Tata and maintaining the reputation of the firm that anyone wanting to break away would lose something and gain nothing.

Q. *What role do you see the future chairman of Tata Sons playing?*

A. That of a motivator, an inspirer, of maintaining the spirit and philosophy of the Tatas. So long as that is assured, the Tata Sons chairman will always play an important role. When I retire, it is the board and not I who will appoint a chairman. I believe it would be an advantage if he bears the Tata name. That is why perhaps the press has identified my successor as Ratan Tata.

Q. *What does the massive expansion and modernisation drive launched by the Tatas signify for the group's future?*

A. I hope more than survival.

Q. *The figure mentioned in press reports is Rs 5,000 crore, which is about as much as the group's assets today.*

A. How can you calculate such a figure? For instance, if you take a project like the Karnal refinery what figure do you put against the Tata name since the Government is an equal partner? In any case, one can't compare today's figures with the past. Can you imagine that we built a one-million-tonne steel plant at Tisco in 1954 for less than Rs 100 crore? Today it will cost Rs 1,000 crore.

Q. *The last time the Tatas collaborated with the Union Government was for Air-India International 40 years ago. Does the Karnal refinery signal a major change in approach?*

A. We've done a number of joint sector projects with state governments. Titan Watches is one example. What seems astonishing now about the Air-India collaboration (the airline was nationalised) is that the Government took just 10 days to reach a decision. Today, proposals are considered for months, and then no decision is taken.

But it is very significant that the Union Government has now decided to collaborate with the Tatas, because earlier not only did the Government nationalise refineries but kept them entirely as a public sector preserve. The Karnal project is an important break with the past, indicating that the Government now recognises the value of collaboration between the public and private sectors. It is a new philosophical approach.

The feeling that the Tatas are suddenly becoming very enterprising has another important aspect. The Government has at least started acting on proposals which were not being approved for two years because of the so-

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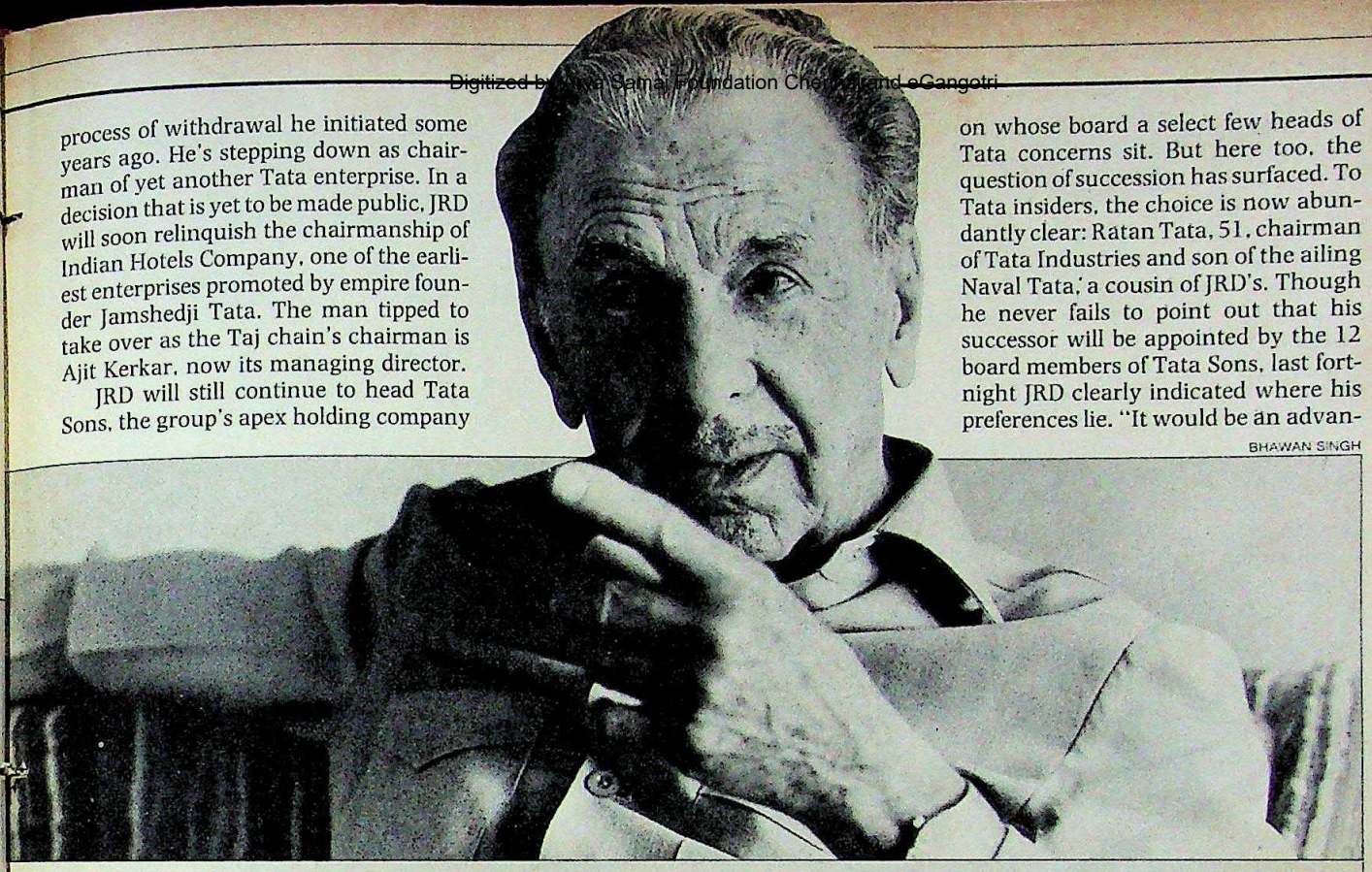
process of withdrawal he initiated some years ago. He's stepping down as chairman of yet another Tata enterprise. In a decision that is yet to be made public, JRD will soon relinquish the chairmanship of Indian Hotels Company, one of the earliest enterprises promoted by empire founder Jamshedji Tata. The man tipped to take over as the Taj chain's chairman is Ajit Kerkar, now its managing director.

JRD will still continue to head Tata Sons, the group's apex holding company on whose board a select few heads of Tata concerns sit. But here too, the question of succession has surfaced. To Tata insiders, the choice is now abundantly clear: Ratan Tata, 51, chairman of Tata Industries and son of the ailing Naval Tata, a cousin of JRD's. Though he never fails to point out that his successor will be appointed by the 12 board members of Tata Sons, last fortnight JRD clearly indicated where his preferences lie. "It would be an advan-

BHAWAN SINGH



called black list of excise-owing business houses.

The Tatas always wanted to expand. In the early years the Government even encouraged it, like when T.T. Krishnamachari (former finance minister) told us that Telco must make trucks. But since then there has been the same old philosophy that private enterprises must be sidelined, that the profit motive is unacceptable. Even Nehru once lost his temper when I mentioned that the public sector must make profits.

Q. *The objection to putting up the Karnal refinery is that it'll be cheaper to import petroleum products. What is your response to that?*

A. For the moment, probably yes, it is cheaper. When there's an oil glut in the world market, imported petroleum products will be cheaper. But the price of oil is bound to rise. What'll happen when it doubles?

Q. *The Tatas have made a bid for DCM's Kota complex. Will take-overs be a route the group will adopt for future expansion?*

A. There is no take-over by the Tatas. We are not buying any DCM shares. The proposal is to buy assets at Kota. A take-over is a totally different proposition.

Q. *How far is the Tata group's future tied to high technology industries?*

A. It would be ideal for the Tatas to get the opportunities to enter high technology, high risk industries. In fact, it is almost a duty since only large groups can afford to take risks, and there are a number of areas India should get into. But look into the damaging control exercised by the Government in computers. There is resistance to the private sector growing in this area, even though the policy of encouraging only government companies has achieved nothing.

Till now the Government has not allowed high-tech industries to develop, except in the public sector. That's why the Tatas have gone abroad. For example, we run one of the few successful genetic engineering companies in the US called Native Plants, which develops new species of plants. The Tatas wanted to develop the company's products in India. The reaction was totally negative. So we went to Singapore, where a joint Tata-Native Plant enterprise is beginning to grow. All industries are going to be high-tech eventually, and India cannot afford to miss out on it.

Q. *Do you see the Tatas expanding internationally in a big way?*

A. To the extent we're allowed to. The Government still keeps a tight control on what we can do abroad. Successful enterprises abroad need not be high-tech. Take the hotel industry—without a penny from India, out of sheer innovation and management ability, the Tatas have developed a group of hotels abroad with local money. Neither the Government nor the Reserve Bank of India could believe it at first.

Q. *Twenty years ago you had made the famous speech "As I wake up every morning...." protesting against restrictions on private industry. Are your mornings different today?*

A. Undoubtedly, there has been a big change, a liberalisation of government policies. It is inevitable after a point when things don't make any sense. I only hope that this gradual liberalisation and privatisation will be a continuous process. We still have some way to go. Just yesterday Homi Sethna (Tomco chairman) was telling me that separate licences are required for making soap and fatty acid, which is the ingredient from which soap is made. It is like asking Telco to get separate licences to make engines and chassis. It makes no sense.

What has not changed is the huge size and power of the bureaucracy, the second largest after the Soviet Union. I can understand that dismantling it would mean putting thousands out of jobs, but if the private sector is to contribute in creating new jobs the bureaucratic restrictions on growth will have to be removed.

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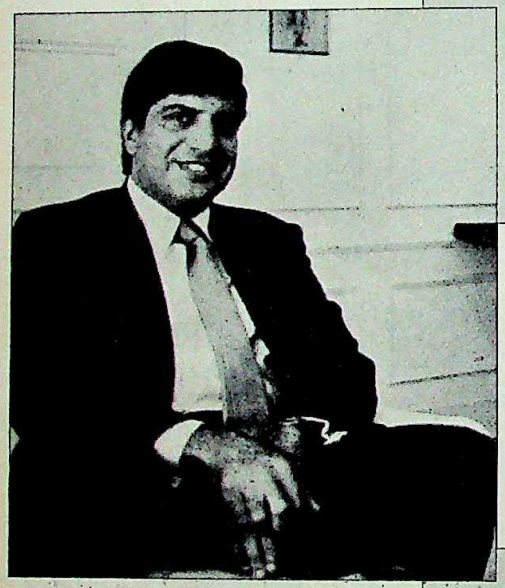
tage to continue with the Tata name, and I believe Ratan Tata has the abilities and the spirit to maintain the philosophy of the group," he said.

While that virtually set the seal on who would steer the Tata conglomerate of over 50 companies (combined assets: around Rs 5,000 crore) in the years ahead, it should come as no surprise. Ratan Tata's appointment a few years ago as chairman of Tata Industries, a shell holding company which he converted into a promoter of high technology companies, had pitchforked him into the limelight as JRD's anointed heir. But the younger Tata had refused to see his elevation to the top job at Tata Industries as proof that he would succeed JRD. Even today, he says: "As J.R.D. Tata views it, the directors of Tata Sons have to decide. I don't believe any set of criteria have been established about who should be the chairman, so I think it's best left that way."



That of course is prudent talk. Unlike other family-dominated business groups, the Tatas have at the helm of their corporations a cadre of technocrats whose power and influence is second only to that of JRD. In some cases, Tata enterprises are run almost as independent fiefdoms, with holding companies such as Tata Sons having a very small equity stake in them. Naval Tata, 84, chairman of the Tata group's electric companies, neatly sums up the position when he says: "There's a Mughal emperor in each of the Tata companies."

One of them could well have been a contender for the top slot. At one stage, Tata Steel Chairman Russi Mody, 70,

RATAN TATA

"The new breed will not share the same old values"

Tata Industries Chairman Ratan Tata spoke to Bureau Chief M. RAHMAN *about the Tata group and government policies. Excerpts from the interview:*

Q. *JRD feels it will be an advantage if the next chairman of Tata Sons carries the Tata name.*

A. Possibly. I've no strong views on that. The chairman who is successful in carrying through what J.R.D. Tata has done might be helped by having that name. But it'll help if he is a person who has the confidence and respect of his colleagues in making the group work together.

> "I feel that if Mody were to choose to retire, it would be for personal reasons."

Q. *Will it help if the next chairman of Tata Sons is also chairman of some of the major companies?*

A. Yes, since the relationship is reversed and the chairman of Tata Sons will derive strength from whosoever is chairman of various operating companies, there will be something to be gained by holding the group together through a common chairman.

Q. *What was your response to Russi Mody's decision to retire?*

A. I have seen it mentioned only in the media. Of all the directors at that age level, Mody is the more physically active individual short of J.R.D. Tata, who is an outstanding example. I feel that if he were to choose to retire, it would be for personal reasons.

Q. *There is also the feeling that without a cohesive centre, the Tata group might break up eventually.*

A. That apprehension will always be there considering the way the group is structured. It has been more a historic, rather than a formal tie. Today the common entity is a function of personal ties. In the future also it will have to be that....

Q. *Do you feel the Tatas need a central corporate office?*

A. There's a need for a central agency, since after the managing agency system was abolished, centralised control became centralised guidance. This was basically provided by J.R.D Tata as the patriarch, and maintained by virtue of his relationships with his colleagues. It would be utopian to imagine it'll go on forever. When JRD and his colleagues retire, the new breed of managers will not share the same values; so what has been an informal, historic system will be lost. It needs to be replaced by some other mechanism, but I don't yet know what.

Q. *The Tatas' massive expansion drive is obviously fuelled by the Government's liberalisation. Do you think the Government is prepared to see it through?*

A. The Government's policy is quite clear in its direction. Unfortunately, there's a vast difference between policy statements and their implementation....For the first time since Independence, industry is facing the pains of exposure to free market forces, to competition. I'm sorry to say that many moves and actions on the part of industry itself inhibit government policy. People who were crying from the roof-tops for liberalisation are now making just as many representations seeking protection. There'll have to be some closing down of companies, there'll have to be some bloodshed, there'll have to be some deaths, but we should be willing to accept them as a short-term necessity to get a leaner, more competitive industry.

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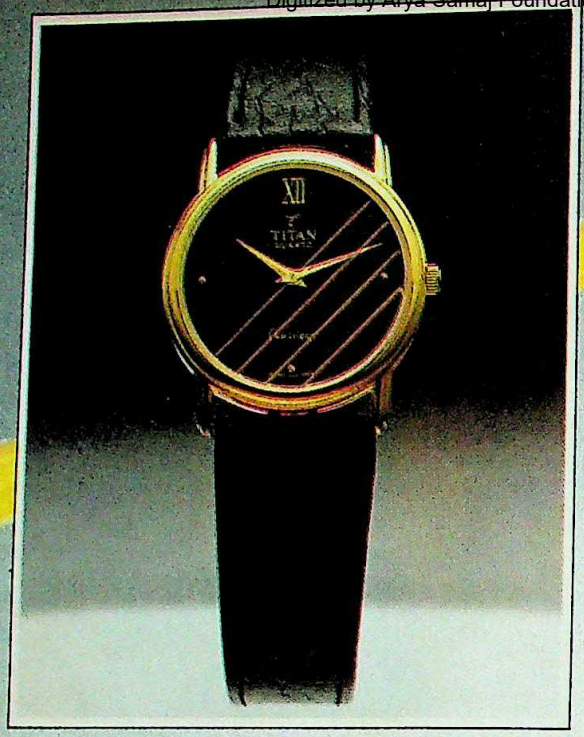

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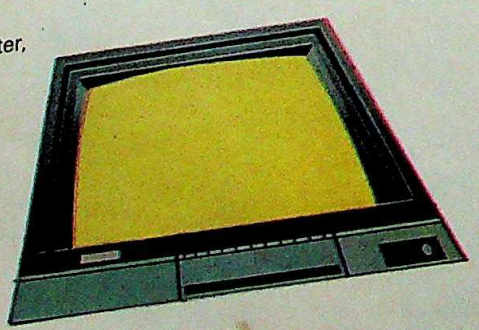

OSCAR

On our way

O'KEEFFES. ICARUS 340

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was a possible candidate for group chairmanship. But Mody suddenly announced last April that he had decided to retire next year after completing 50 years in India's largest private sector company.

Mody's unexpected announcement provoked comment, especially as it came after Ratan Tata's appointment as executive deputy chairman of automobile giant Telco. The job put Ratan in line to succeed Sumant Moolgaokar, 83, the present chairman and architect of the company's growth, who will be retiring next April. Significantly, JRD had earlier decided that Mody would take over as Telco chairman, while Ratan would become his deputy. This would have made Mody boss of the two largest Tata companies, with combined sales of nearly Rs 3,000 crore, which is more than half the group's total turnover—and put him in a strong position to stake a claim to the group chairmanship.

What went wrong? Mody was abroad and unavailable for comment. But top Tata sources indicate that, amazingly, it was a newspaper report that changed his fortunes. A Calcutta daily reported that Mody saw his imminent takeover of the Telco chairmanship as another instance of his being asked to rescue a company in trouble. Telco's profits dipped last year, but this was a temporary set-back flowing from the automobile giant's ambitious expansion programme. A livid Moolgaokar decided not to step down from the chairman's post, and ensured that only Deputy Chairman Ratan would succeed him when he finally retires.

MODY'S decision to quit Tata Steel next year is far from formalised. But if he does bow out, Deputy Chairman Ratan will succeed him. Come April, a man known for steering clear of corporate politics will find himself at the helm of two of the largest Tata companies much earlier than anyone had expected. Any doubts about his eventual appointment as chairman of Tata Sons, and so to the leadership of the entire group, will then be firmly buried.

Still, if Ratan takes over as chairman of Tata Sons, the position he will occupy within the group will be very different from that of its patriarch. JRD, also an unexpected choice for the top job in 1938, was once chairman of 11 major companies besides Tata Sons. He has progressively handed over charge to others, with only a few of the companies, like the Tata electric group, going to cousin Naval Tata. In spite of strong opposition from a section of his advisers, he remains firmly committed to the belief that the men who contributed crucially to the growth of the Tata companies should be the chairmen. "JRD's mistake is to see chairmanships as a reward for good performance," says a Tata company director. "Without a strong centre personified by a chairman common to the major companies, the Tata group can splinter like the Mughal empire. What will then prevent a raider like Manu Chhabria from grabbing the pieces?"

But other Tata family members remain optimistic about the group's future. "If the group has survived with so little Tata equity in most of the companies, it is because the Tatas have lived up to their traditions," says Naval Tata. Adds wife Simone, chairperson of Lakme: "No satellite groups will develop. The Tatas are a unique group, dominated not by family members but by the family name and philosophy—a corporate culture marked by a pioneering spirit, a reputation for integrity, and for serving employees, shareholders and the public well."

"After the managing agency system was abolished in 1970 we had a long internal debate, and finally decided there's strength in synergy, let's stick together," says Tata Sons Director S.A. Sabavala. "JRD leads by consensus, and even if the younger managers appear more impatient, the Tata tradition will dominate."

Even so, questions are now being raised as to whether it would not be better for the Tatas to evolve a central corporate office similar to that of a multinational, to impart cohesiveness and direction to the group. Some Tata gurus in fact advocate a centralised system. This will make sense in a post-JRD era because JRD served as the cementing force "by virtue of his relationships with his colleagues," as Ratan Tata puts it (*see box*). Tata Oil Mills Company Chairman Homi Sethna, who also runs the electric companies, is one who favours tighter controls. Minoo Mody, chief executive of Tata Sons and chairman of Tata Unisys, is another. He believes that in today's competitive environment Tata corporate policy will gradually change and a central office will seek to provide greater direction to the group. "Unlike in the past, you'll have to get out if you can't make a company successful in two years' time," he says.

Such concerns would perhaps have been unthinkable in the Tata group in the past. But after stagnating in the '70s, the conglomerate is modernising and expanding with alacrity. After Ratan took over Tata Industries, he initiated a

THE TATA EMPIRE (1987-88)

	ASSETS	SALES (Rs crore)	NET PROFITS
TATA STEEL	1,189.0	1,526.8	92.1
TELCO	683.3	1,402.6	27.0
ACC (1986-87) (Significant Tata stake)	522.6	745.4	34.0
TATA CHEMICALS	419.2	230.4	27.2
TATA POWER	364.0	331.3	6.4
ANDHRA VALLEY POWER SUPPLY	212.3	206.0	3.9
TATA HYDRO-ELECTRIC	146.1	137.2	2.3
INDIAN HOTELS	115.3	105.6	6.7
TATA TEA (1987)	114.3	142.8	11.1
VOLTAS (1986-87)	101.0	362.2	6.9
TATA OIL MILLS	83.5	274.6	1.6
RALLIS INDIA (Significant Tata stake)	82.4	261.0	8.3
TATA FERTILISERS (Not fully operational as yet)	74.4	7.1	4.1
NELCO	60.0	69.7	0.73
SWADESHI MILLS	17.7	42.3	1.5
TATA UNISYS (1987)	16.9	27.1	1.6
LAKME (1986-87)	12.8	55.2	1.3

* Major enterprises only

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Tata Steel Chairman Russi Mody figured as a contender for group chairmanship. But a newspaper report changed his fortunes.

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strategy planning exercise to identify opportunities and growth areas. In the last three years, Tata companies have initiated or proposed modernisation programmes or new projects calling for investments of thousands of crore rupees, with Tata Steel's modernisation alone accounting for Rs 1,000 crore. "The Tatas are moving faster than any other business group except Reliance," says economist Gangadhar Gadgil. "They seem to have recovered their vitality and are moving into new areas."

Telco Chairman Sumant Moolgaokar ensured that only Deputy Chairman Ratan Tata would succeed him when he retires.

These include a new line of light commercial vehicles, passenger cars and a possible Daimler Benz export unit, forays into the new fast growth fields of oil drilling, computers, telephone instruments and telecommunications, a forthcoming move into finance in partnership with American Express, a Rs 765-crore fertiliser complex in Uttar Pradesh, and the Karnal refinery in collaboration with Indian Oil Corporation. "What you see at the moment is just the pent up ability to undertake these expansions and diversifications coming into the open now that government policy allows it," explains Ratan Tata.

SPEARHEADING the drive are Tata Chemicals and Tata Tea, the world's largest and most diversified tea company which recently put in a Rs 150-crore bid for DCM's Kota complex.

The flurry of activity by these two companies has suddenly focused attention on Darbari Seth, 68, who controls a sizeable and rapidly expanding segment of the Tata empire as chairman of Tata Chemicals, Tata Tea, Rallis India and Tata Fertilisers. He is also the corporate czar behind the controversial Tata bid to re-establish a significant equity base in Associated Cement Companies, and is seen as a future chairman of the cement behemoth.

Seth, who was brought into Tata Chemicals as a 31-year-old chemical engineer by JRD, has till recently been the least visible of a triad of powerful Tata line managers. Of the three, the ailing Moolgaokar has already decided to bow out, and Mody has expressed a desire to follow suit. But Seth is at the centre of a bold new thrust. It is largely Seth's burgeoning financial clout which has raised visions of a future where centrifugal forces may tear the Tata group asunder. But Seth himself feels that the strength of the Tata superstructure comes from the space JRD provided his corporate managers to take independent initiatives. "The Tata group is a commonwealth of enterprises, not an empire," he says. "At the core, the system remains very, very sound. There has always been an informal corporate centre, with a lot of interaction and consultations."

Interestingly, Seth's yen for expansion remained undimmed even after some of his close advisers left the organisation, confirming the view that his has essentially been a one-man operation. But now a group of young managers led by his son Manu Seth, 37, a highly qualified chemical engineer who was appointed executive director of Tata Chemicals, is identified as his "think-tank". The group includes Vijay Rai, vice-president of Rallis, and Krishna Kumar, joint managing director of Tata Tea, both products of the Tata Administrative Service (TAS).

As Ratan Tata takes on greater responsibility, younger Tata managers, many from TAS, will gradually move into positions of authority. Till now economist Freddie Mehta of Forbes, Forbes and Campbell is the only TAS manager who has occupied a chairman's cabin. Finding their path blocked on the corporate ladder, many TAS managers dropped out in the past. Several now constitute the second management tier—Xerxes Desai, managing director of Titan Watches; Arun Maira, executive director of Telco; Camelia Punjabi, vice-president, and S. Ramakrishnan, executive director of the Taj group of hotels, and Partha Sarkar, the director in charge of Tata Finance who assisted Ratan Tata in the strategy planning exercise. "Believe me, it was a long haul before I got to do what I liked," he says. But now the very fact of increased growth will give more opportunities to younger managers.

It is to the younger lot that Ratan will have to turn to in the long run for help in facing the problems ahead. One spectre has already raised its head. The gigantic expansion and modernisation plans the Tatas have drawn up raise the question of how companies will service the enormous debt burden that will result. Telco's interest payments last year amounted to Rs 78 crore (though the figure will drop when some debentures are converted into equity). Even Darbari Seth's cash-rich companies will have to borrow heavily to implement the new plans, but Seth remains confident that the projects will independently service the debt burden.

While the Tatas did not display much innovativeness in money management in the past, the exigencies of the expansion drive have made the group adopt a much less conservative attitude to raising money from the market. "I don't remember a single public issue by the Tatas in the second half of the '70s, but now they display great confidence and continuously raise money from the market," says a merchant banker.

The financial clout of Tata Chemicals Chairman Darbari Seth has raised visions of centrifugal forces splitting the group.

Clearly, what the Tatas are witnessing today is not just a transfer of power from one generation to another. It's also a new energy and a more aggressive style. And these should make the Tatas unassailable as India's premier business house.

—M. RAHMAN

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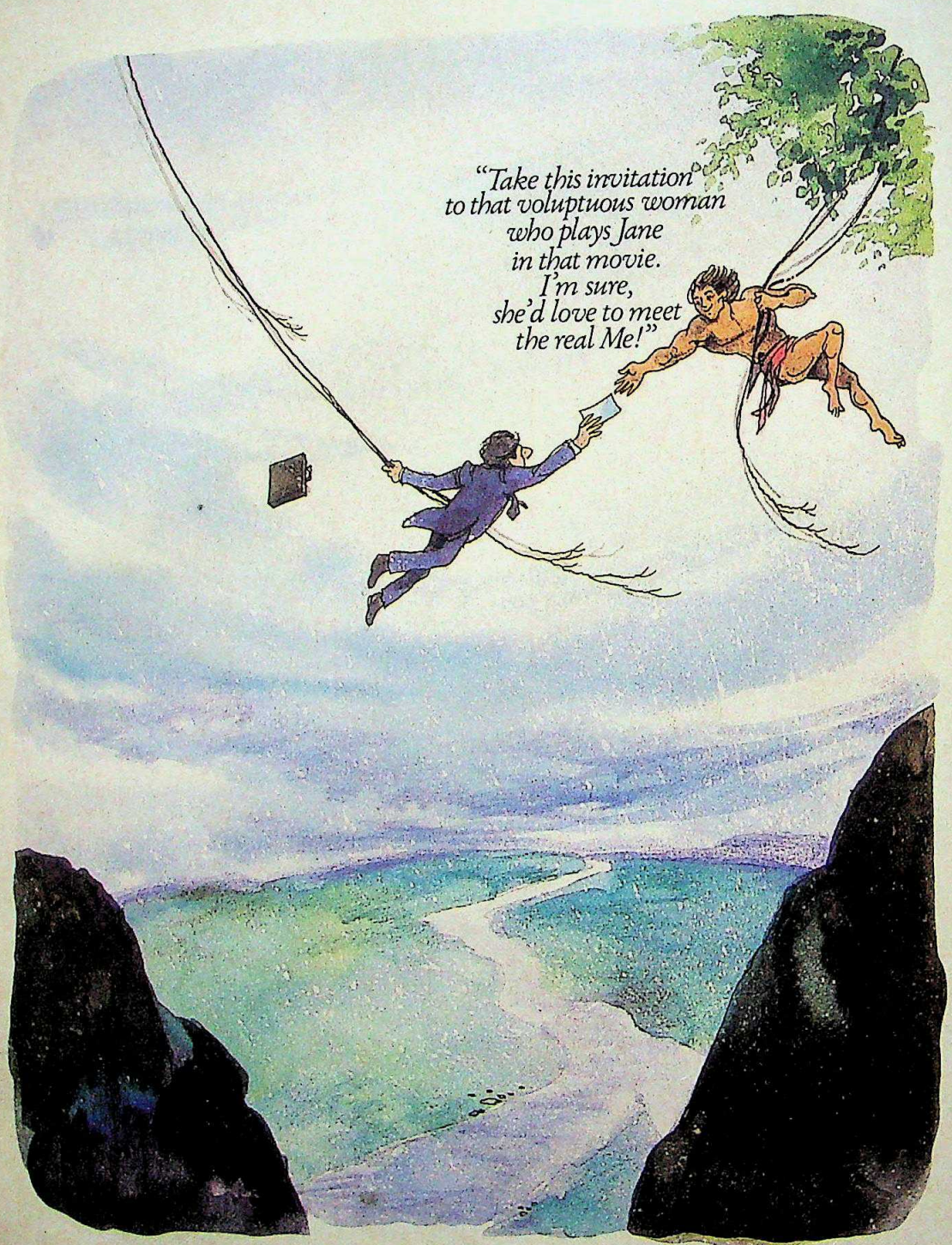

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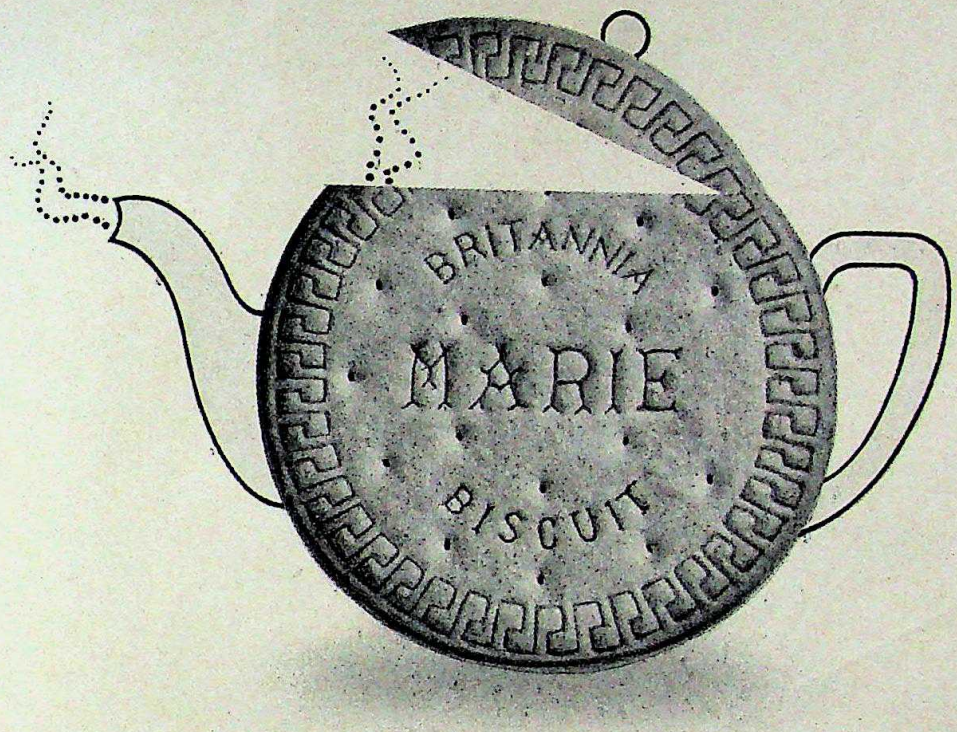

Tea-times were made for it!

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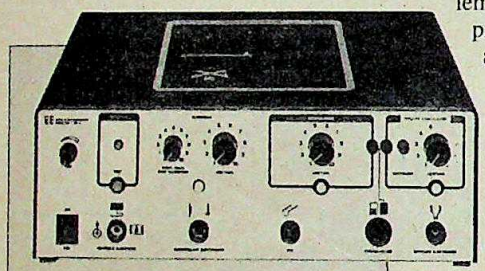
MEDICAL ELECTRONICS

Hi-Tech Gizmos

Several units enter the fray

TAKE a Rs 100-crore market. Add an official forecast of sales burgeoning to Rs 2,500 crore in a mere 12 years. The outcome is a heady sense of excitement—and a headlong corporate rush.

The industry in question: medical electronics. Ruled so far by a handful of companies such as Siemens India and IGE (India), the medical electronics market is suddenly being buffeted by the winds of change. New heavyweights are leaping in, others are waiting in the wings, nearly everyone's scouting for foreign collaborations, and the big boys already in the business are readying to unveil new hi-tech gizmos.



High frequency electro surgery unit

Last fortnight, Larsen & Toubro (L&T) launched a full-fledged medical equipment division, after signing technical collaboration agreements with Italy's Kontron Instruments and Biocardia and West Germany's ERBE Electromedizin Gmbh. The Rs 580-crore engineering giant wants to invest Rs 25 crore in manufacturing diagnostic ultrasound equipment and electro-cardiograph machines.

Peico Electronics & Electricals Ltd (formerly known as Philips) has already tested the waters by hawking 90 ultrasound machines. Next on Peico's anvil is an X-ray equipment project, which will go on stream next year.

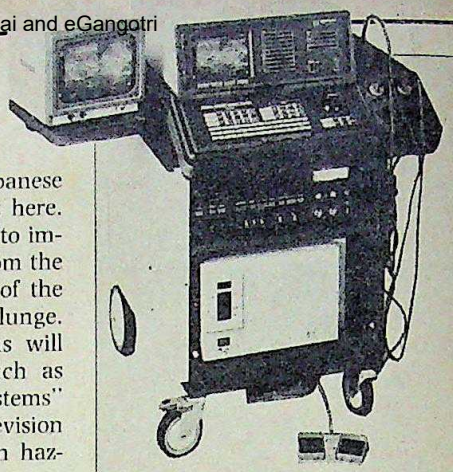
Nor is this all. The recently-promoted Usha Dragger has entered into partnership with West Germany's Draggerwork for a Rs 3-crore project to turn out patient monitoring equipment. Toshniwal Brothers (Bombay) Pvt Ltd, which imports medical machines from Japan, is collaborating with a Japanese unit to manufacture equipment here. And Killick Nixon, which plans to import refurbished cat scanners from the US, is assessing the possibility of the Indian market before taking the plunge.

Not to be outdone, Siemens will introduce newer equipment such as "image intensifier television systems" (where the image appears on television screens, so minimising radiation hazards) in the market.

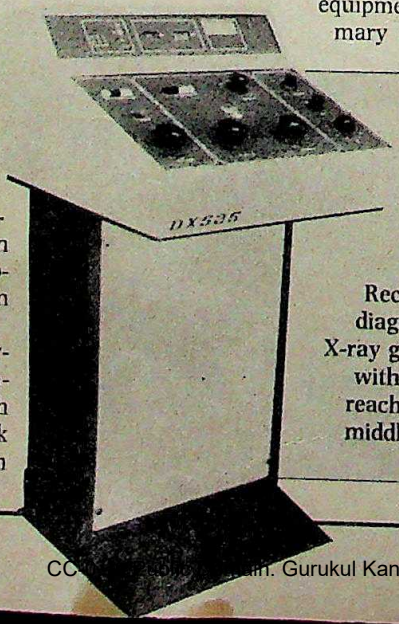
Even the Government has woken up to the ferment. In late August, it formed a 12-member task force to study, among other things, manufacturers' tax problems. The official move is partially prompted by concern that as much as 70 per cent of the medical equipment sold now in India is imported. But the corporate sector is convinced that the Government will eventually have to clamp down on imports, and that the future lies in manufacturing equipment at home. Says S.D. Vakil, vice-president (medical systems) of IGE (India): "There's a tremendous scope for indigenous manufacturers. I see a boom period for them."

There are several reasons for the unbounded optimism. For one, hospitals in the country are dogged with the problem of servicing imported equipment. Companies that manufacture products here offer servicing facilities.

More important is that, if the market is big now, it is likely to get vastly bigger. The Central Government has already embarked on a programme of installing medical electronic equipment in 21 primary health centres, with plans to extend the programme to another 100. Says Vinay Rai, director of Usha Dragger: "The Government has signed a World Health Organisation document which promises Health For All by 2000 AD. To achieve this, we will require 25,000 moderately equipped primary health centres, compared with only 7,000 now."



Diagnostic ultrasound equipment



Rectified diagnostic X-ray generator: within the reach of the middle class

Industry executives also argue that the new health insurance schemes offered by insurance companies have put expensive medical treatment within the reach of the middle class—and it is more aware of the importance of health. Affirms G.S. Krishnamoorty, general manager of the medical engineering division at Seimens: "The middle class is becoming much more health conscious than ever before and is ready to pay for good medical treatment."

Nevertheless, the road to prosperity has a few humps. Local products won't come cheap because manufacturers have to fork out a 40 per cent customs duty on imported components. But government institutions and charitable concerns can import equipment duty free. "Naturally, why should they buy our equipment," asks J.V. Vaidya, who heads L&T's medical equipment section. The servicing facilities companies offer may be one answer, but the country's liberal import rules are undoubtedly a hitch. So manufacturers want the Government to permit duty-free imports of components and to ban the import of equipment made here.

Hopefully, the task force will write out a prescription for these problems. The demand for advanced indigenous equipment may force the Government to swallow the medicine—further fuelling an industry boom that's in the making.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Bombay

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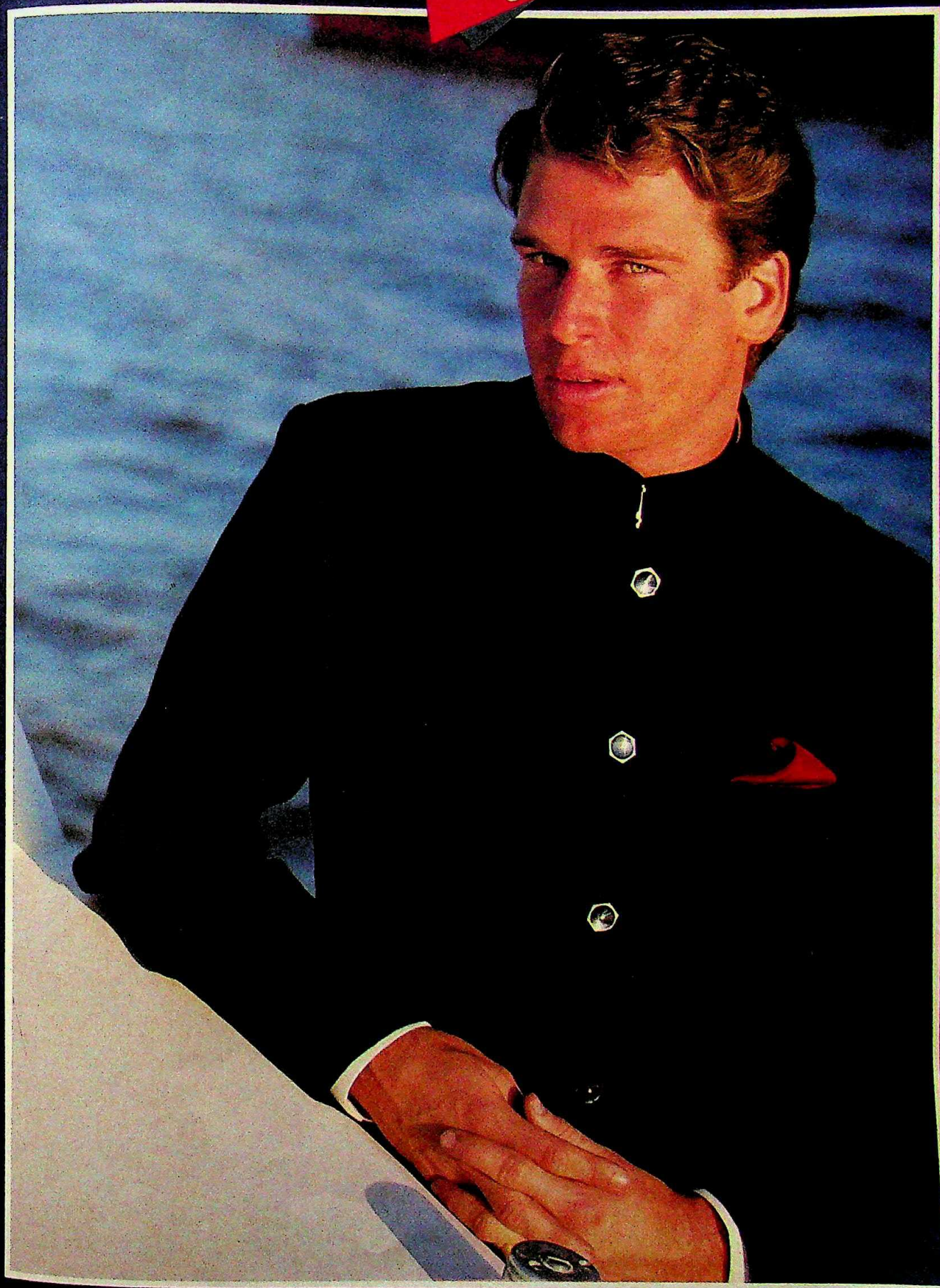

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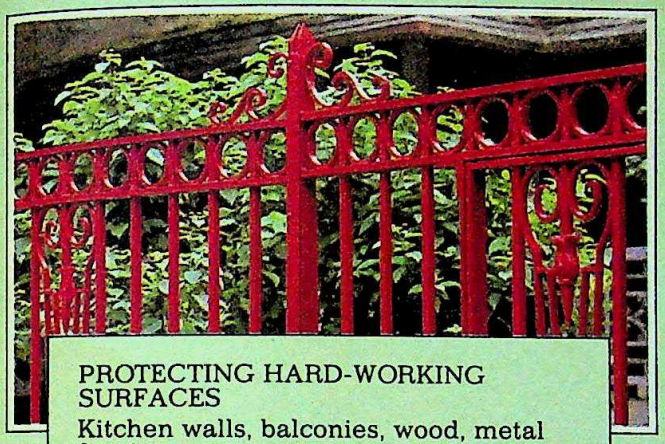

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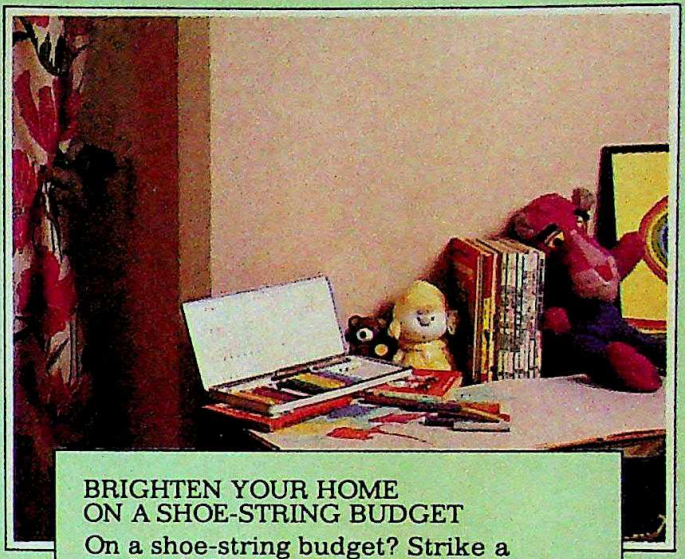

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CONSUMER CREDIT

The Big Splurge

Finance firms trigger off a trend

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Singhal with his Maruti: a happy debtor

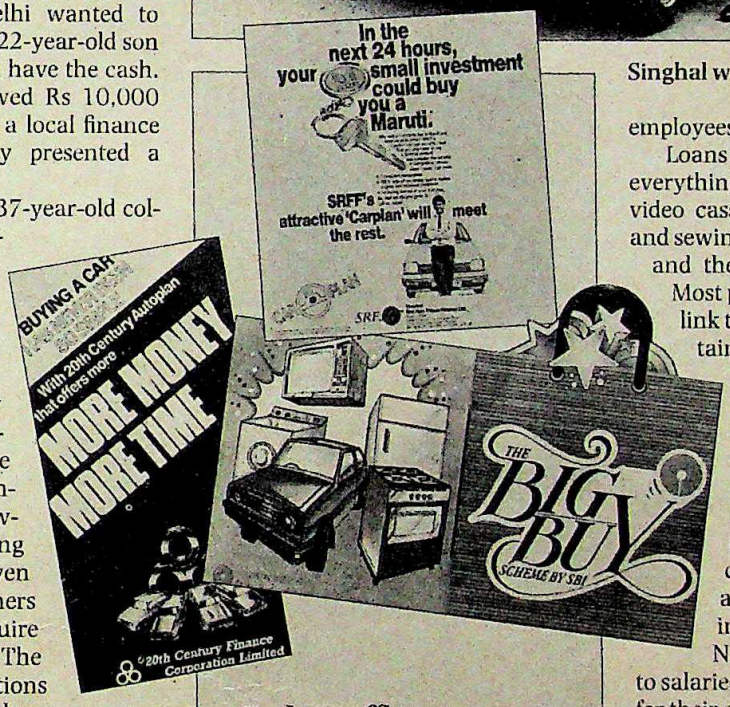
OVER a year ago, Sanjay Singhal, 26, had an urge to own a Maruti car. He had some money, but not enough. So the Delhi-based businessman approached Shri Ram Fibres Finance for a loan of Rs 65,000. A few weeks ago, he got the loan—and now proudly drives around in a blue Maruti.

Two years ago, C.L. Choudhry too was caught up by a desire. The 50-year-old personal assistant to the principal of a public school in Delhi wanted to present a scooter to his 22-year-old son Yogesh. Snag: he didn't have the cash. Last month, he borrowed Rs 10,000 from Capital Trust Ltd, a local finance company, and proudly presented a scooter to his son.

And in Hyderabad, 37-year-old college lecturer Ashok Kumar Suryadevara recently took a loan of Rs 9,400 from Nagarjuna Finance to buy a colour television set.

Singhal, Choudhry and Suryadevara represent a new trend: the coming of age of consumer financing. A growing body of affluent young professionals and even middle class salary earners is borrowing cash to acquire life's goodies now. "The revolution of expectations has come to India," declares Suren Khirwadkar, vice-president and marketing director at Citibank. Adds S.K. Sen, director at Shri Ram Fibres Finance: "Unlike in the West where every man lives on credit, the concept is new to India. But it's catching on."

And it's catching on thanks to several foreign and public sector banks, private finance companies and even consumer product manufacturers. Among them are Citibank, Bank of India, Canara Bank, Nagarjuna Finance, Bajaj Auto Finance (an arm of the two-wheeler giant) and Sandeep Agencies (part of the Hero group of two-wheeler companies). They have all launched consumer credit schemes. Their ranks will only swell. Standard Chartered Bank is poised to enter the business. And last fortnight, the State Bank of India (SBI) announced a credit programme called "Big Buy".



Today, affluent young professionals and even the salaried middle class are borrowing cash to spend on life's goodies.

The daddy of the business is, however, Citibank. Two years ago, the US bank set the ball rolling with its 'Citimobile' scheme, lending money to individuals with an annual income of Rs 40,000 and above to buy a new car, at 16.5 per cent interest. The bank also approaches companies and offers their employees loans.

Loans are now available for virtually everything, from television sets and video cassette recorders to computers and sewing machines. The sums offered and the conditions stipulated vary. Most public sector banks cautiously link their loans to customers maintaining recurring deposits with them, lending out a maximum of five times the deposit amount. In contrast, SBI offers loans of up to eight times the borrower's salary, laying down two conditions: the borrower must have worked for a company for at least five years, and have a minimum monthly income of Rs 2,000. And Nagarjuna Finance lends money to salaried employees who have worked for their current employer for over three years.

"It's a huge market out there," says Ravindra Bahl, vice-president and domestic business manager at Citibank. SBI would probably agree. It has set apart an ambitious Rs 150 crore for consumer credit this year.

The experience of other finance agencies and banks also testifies to the demand. Nearly all report a gratifying response to their schemes. Shri Ram Fibres Finance has seen its consumer loans surge from Rs 3 crore last year to Rs 8 crore this year—despite levying interest of up to 22 per cent. Nagarjuna Finance has lent Rs 11 crore so far. Even the pint-sized Capital Trust loaned Rs 15 lakh in a year for the purchase of two-wheelers alone.

A chorus of corporate voices ex-

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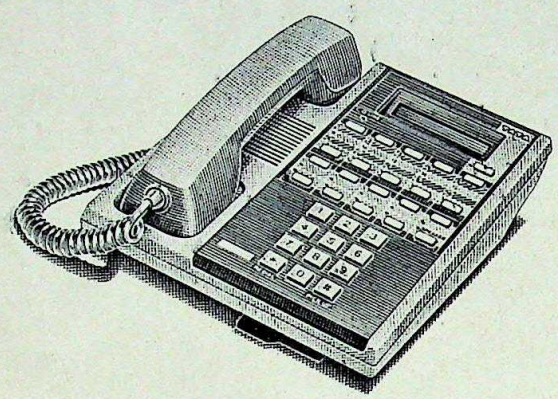

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plains the rush to offer consumer credit in terms of the demand. The banks also insist that they're providing a service. "We felt we had to do something for the salaried middle class too," says N.V. Muranjan, SBI's general manager for personal services banking. Even so, there's little doubt that profits were a major incentive. The banks get money for 10 per cent or less and charge 16.5 per cent interest, pocketing the difference.

For consumer goods manufacturers, however, the reason is different. They're looking to hawk wares, often in fiercely competitive markets, and such schemes induce customers to buy the wares linked to them now, rather than in the future. About 10 per cent of Escorts' sales and 1 per cent of Hero Honda's ride on financing schemes.

For all the euphoria, there is a pitfall. "The one big problem is that the creditworthiness of the majority of people cannot be figured out," complains Sen of Shri Ram Fibre Finance. So private finance agencies go by gut feeling, and by what they've unearthed from visits to the loan seeker's office or shop.

But once loans are granted, the 'buy now, pay later' syndrome feeds on itself. "I wouldn't be surprised if my brother or brother-in-law takes a loan for a car," says Singhal. And Choudhry adds that he would consider taking another loan to buy a colour television set once he clears his two-wheeler loan. That's how the West was won. Clearly, India is now being won too.

—TONY JOSEPH with bureau reports

GAMMON INDIA

Under Siege

Chhabrias stalk the company

THE year: 1985. Dubai-based businessman Manohar R. Chhabria and his brother Kishore are embroiled in a battle to acquire the professionally-run Shaw Wallace, with the Calcutta-based liquor giant's managing director fighting them all the way. The Chhabias eventually win that tussle.

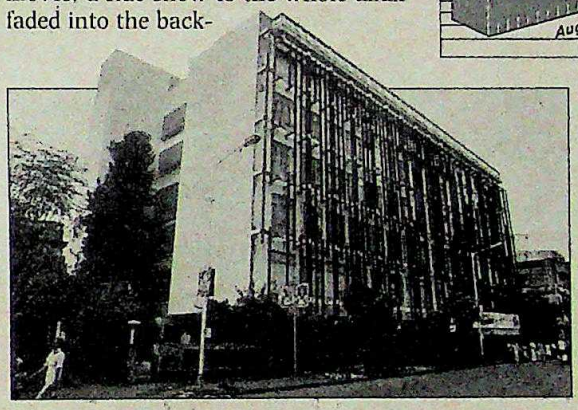
Three years and many take-overs later, history is repeating itself. The Chhabrias are again stalking a company—and its managing director is trying to stave off their hug.

The heat now is on Gammon India Ltd, the Rs 100-crore Bombay-based construction enterprise. Last fortnight, its seven-member board met and resolved to fight the Chhabrias. Managing Director T.N. Subba Rao vowed: "Yes, we will give them a tough fight."

The management has launched an offensive that will see it petitioning the Government, refusing to register any shares the Chhabrias may buy—they've picked up more than 10 per cent from the market—and shopping for shares.

The Chhabrias, meantime, are readying to escalate hostilities. They hope to corner at least 32 per cent of the company's equity. Then they'll requisition an emergency shareholders meeting, well before the annual meeting scheduled for December.

Amidst these moves and countermoves, a side-show to the whole affair faded into the background. About three months ago, Calcutta-based industrialist Bimal Poddar acquired a 2.6-per cent stake in Gammon India from the market. The management refused to register the shares, Poddar appealed to the Company Law Board, and now refuses to hawk his shares. Says Poddar: "We have no intention of selling our shares."

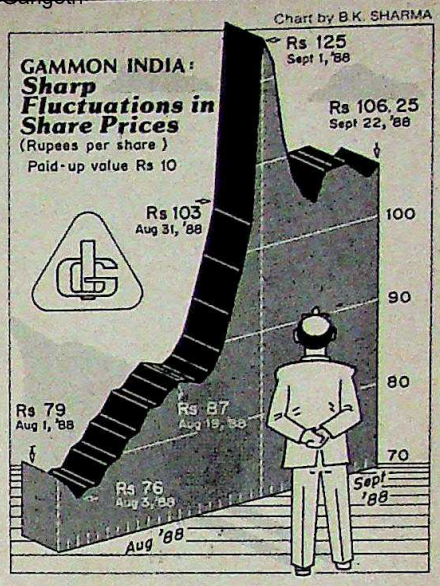


Gammon House in Bombay: readying for battle

Meanwhile, the Chhabrias were launching their own siege. They opened their first front on the stock-markets. The Gammon India scrip was quoted at Rs 79 on August 1. By the month's end, the price began soaring, peaking at Rs 125 on September 1, stabilising later at around Rs 106.

Kishore Chhabria declined to comment, but acknowledged that the brothers had bought shares: "We're making some investments in Gammon." That's not surprising. Gammon is a prize worth snaring. It's flush with funds (reserves and surplus of Rs 13 crore), and has assets (including prime property in Bombay) of over Rs 98 crore.

Above all, Gammon's shareholding pattern makes it vulnerable to a take-over—a fourth of the company's Rs 2.16-crore equity is held in the UK, and is equally divided between two branches of the Gammon family. One branch is headed by Peter Gammon, the eldest son of company founder J.C. Gammon, and the other by J.C. Gammon's fourth wife Angela and her three sons. With a 6-per cent stake, the financial institutions cannot decide the outcome of a take-over attempt. The directors and employees hold 8 per cent, while the public owns 61 per cent.



Logically, any marauder would mop up shares from the public. But this can be time consuming and expensive. The key to control is, thus, the Gammon family shares. Gammon India Chairman James Bates, who represents the family's interests on the company's board, says: "Peter Gammon, who was co-opted on the board this year, is averse to any change of ownership. But Angela's family has no direct interest in the firm and could sell its shares if it gets a good price."

That's what the Chhabrias are counting on. They're negotiating with this wing of the family for its 12.5 per cent stake. With the 10 per cent they already own, plus another 10 per cent from the market, their tally would go up to 32.5 per cent—a block that would put them in the driver's seat.

But the Chhabrias won't find the going easy. With the management digging in for a long bloody war, Gammon India might not quite turn out to be another Shaw Wallace.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Bombay

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PROCESSED FOODS

An Appetising Package

Government unveils a new policy

ITEM: Goetze, the Escorts group company, wants to export fruits and vegetables, subsequently set up a processing plant and even, later down the road, a supermarket chain.

Item: soft-drinks giant Parle is readying to launch instant, masala-flavoured noodles, and has a freeze-dried fruits and vegetables project up its sleeves.

Item: an Indian concern is talking to US chewing gum manufacturer Wrigleys on a project here.

Suddenly, there's a heady sense of excitement in an industry that has languished for years: processed foods. The big boys are queuing up before the Government with proposals to manufacture or export food products and processed foods. Others are making forays into the latest food processing equipment. The Indore-based Winner Technology, for example, wants to tie up with a Swedish company to turn out instant quick freezing systems. "In just two months, we've had practically every well-known company approaching us," says Minister of State for Food Processing, Jagdish Tytler, with satisfaction.

Even foreign food giants are heading for India. Swiss foods giant Nestle, for instance, is partnering a local snacks manufacturer in a joint venture and will be picking up the project's entire output for 10 years.

The burst of activity on the processed foods front is partly explained by the star billings the industry now attracts. Last fortnight, the industry went centre-stage as the Government announced a brand-new policy for it. In a package that spelled dramatic changes, the recently-created Food Processing Ministry promised to slash taxes on processed foods and packaging materials; throw open the industry to big business; encourage Indian companies to set up ventures abroad; permit foreign investors to link up with rural cooperatives for export purposes; and provide foreign airlines that pick up cargo with landing rights delinked from rights granted overseas to Air-India.

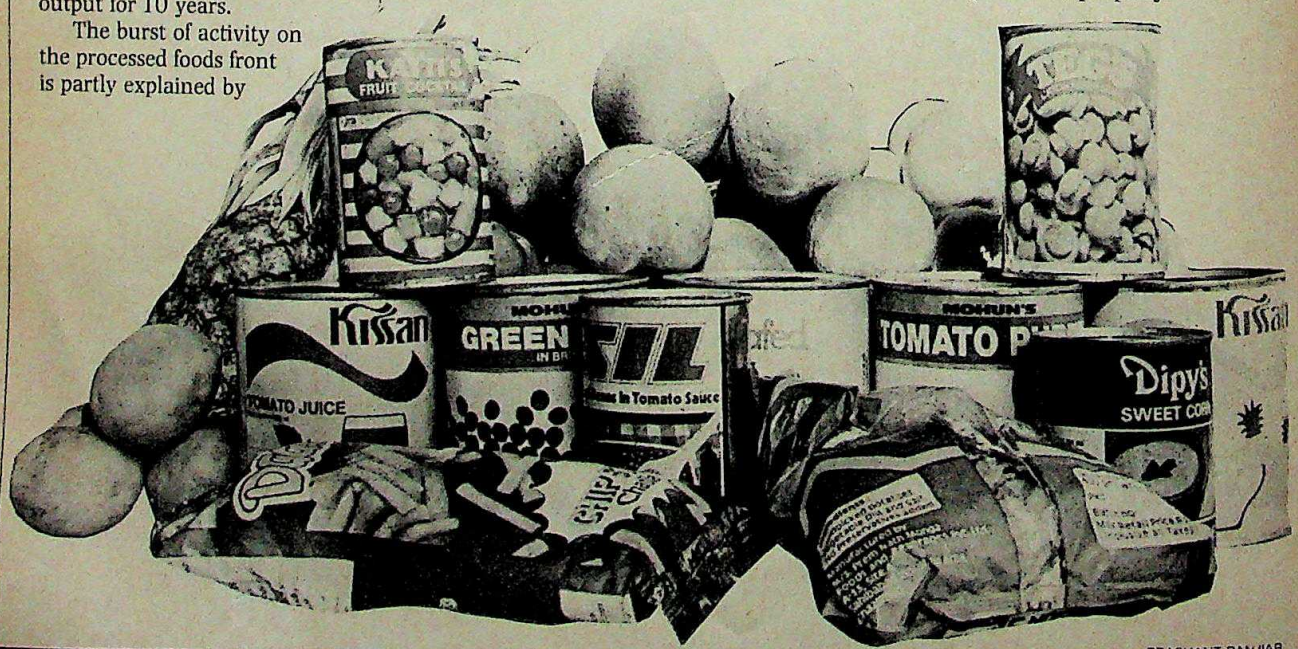
Clearly, the Government has dumped the shibboleths of the past—and the corporate sector is quick to hurrah this. Referring to the lifting of curbs on big business, Punjab Agro Industries Corporation Managing Director Gokul Patnaik says: "At present the industry suffers from lack of state-of-the-art technology in processing, packaging and marketing. Only big houses can afford to make large investments in these areas and bridge the gap."

As Vinay Kumar, executive director of the National Agricultural Marketing Federation points out, the policy is also perhaps the first serious official attempt at identifying the industry's problems. So most industry men are understandably upbeat about the policy's impact. Forecasts K.N. Chopra, president elect of the All India Food Preservers Association: "The new policy will surely help. It will be easier to get bank loans, imported equipment and new technology."

Nearly everyone also welcomes the "open skies" policy. The Government provides landing rights to foreign airlines on a reciprocal basis, but the reciprocity principle will no longer apply to airlines that pick up cargo from India. "The open skies policy is good, for it relieves us from being at the mercy of Air-India," says Parle boss Ramesh Chauhan. "Now it will be possible for us to charter planes and export our goods."

Aware that the policy was in the works, most companies had put in some advance spadework. Those that didn't, are now reviewing their options. In the capital, Northland Industries, a small enterprise, may soon scout for a foreign collaborator. Northland partner and industry elder Y.K. Kapoor says: "It has encouraged us to look for a foreign collaborator who will provide technology and marketing experience." And Punjab Agro, which had been sounded on tie-ups by a couple of developing nations such as Kenya, will probably take these enquiries more seriously than in the past.

Unquestionably, all this means drastic change. Few would, however, question the need for it. India grows almost 10 per cent of the world's vegetables and fruits. Yet over 30 per cent of this bounty rots every year, simply because they can't be preserved properly. The food-



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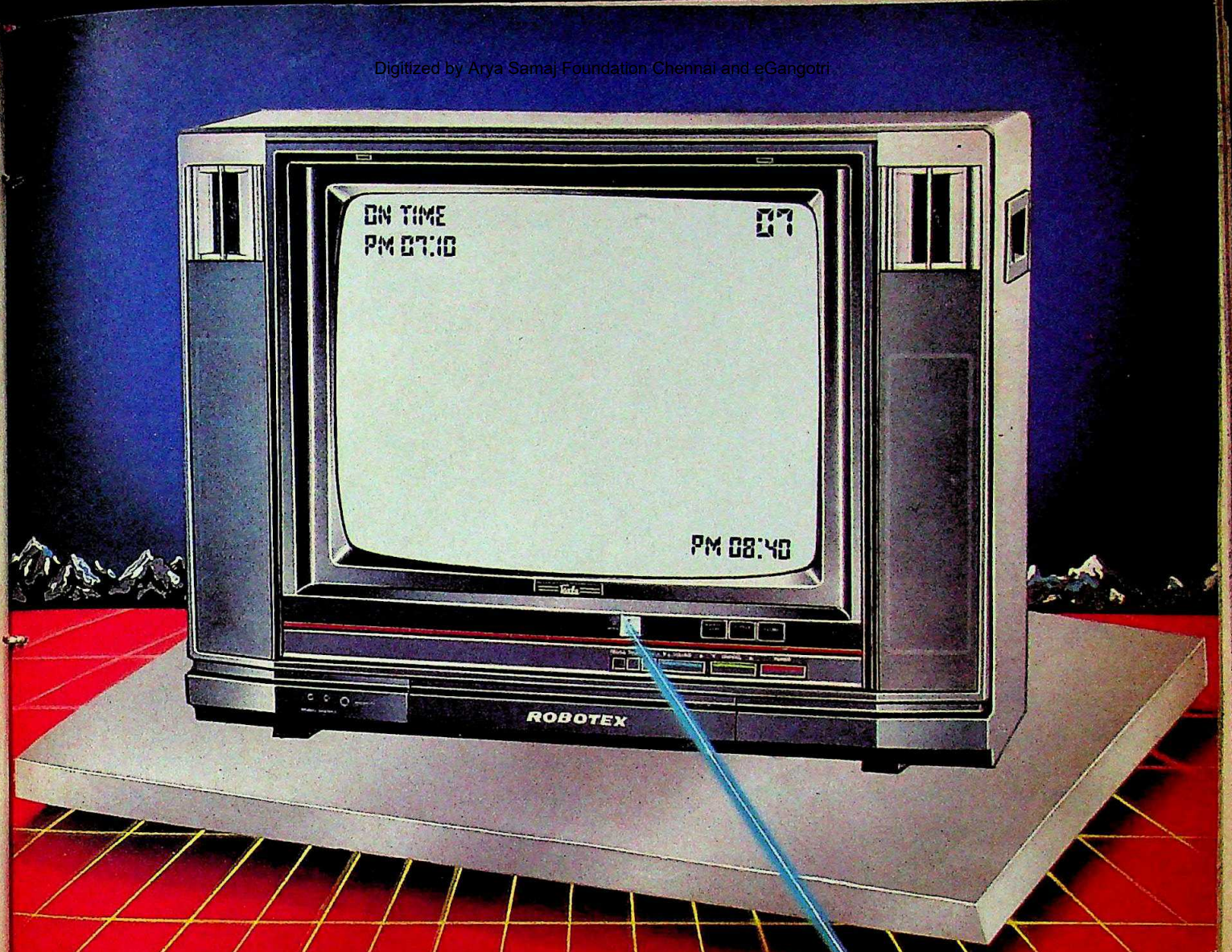

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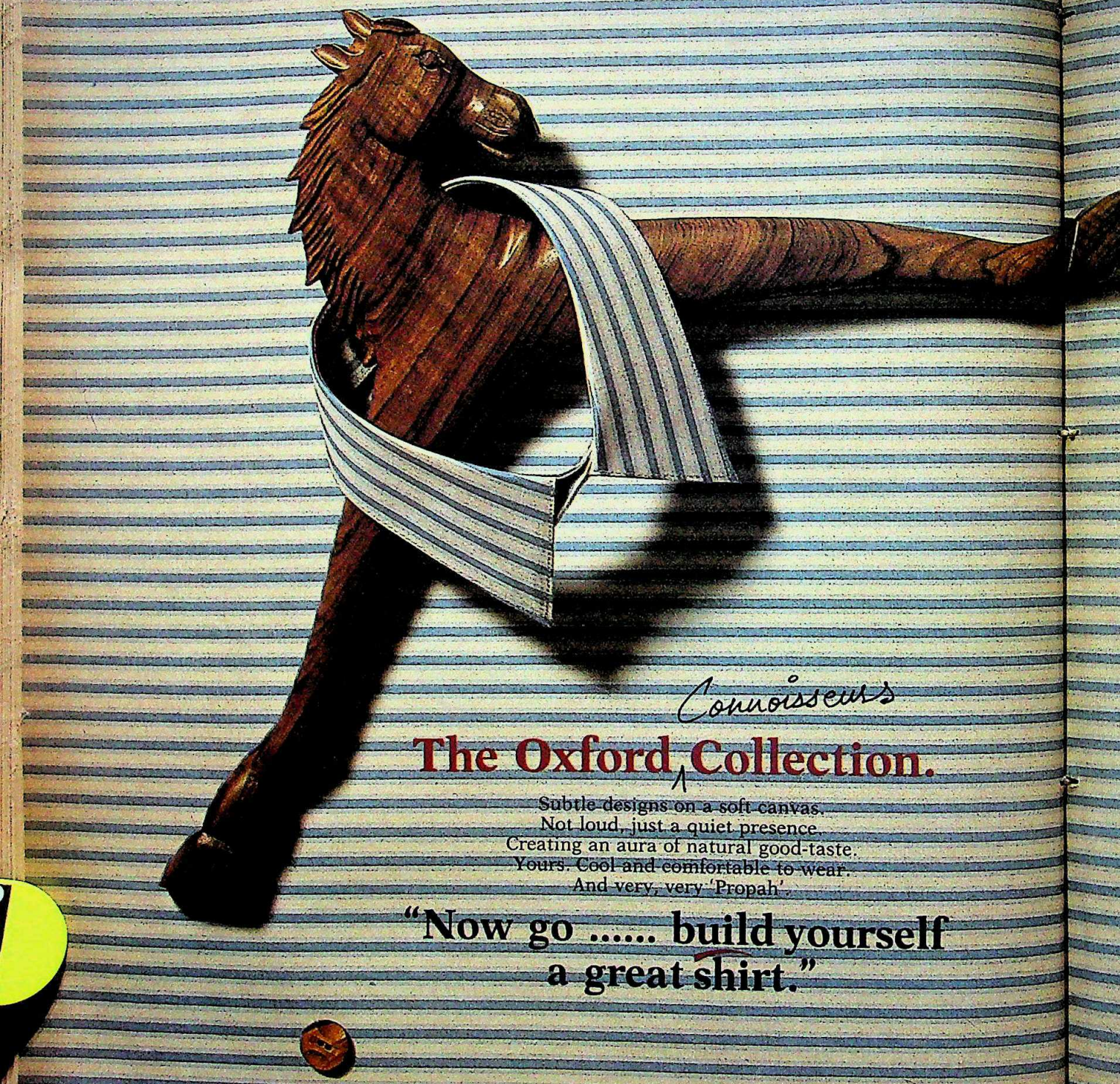

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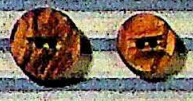

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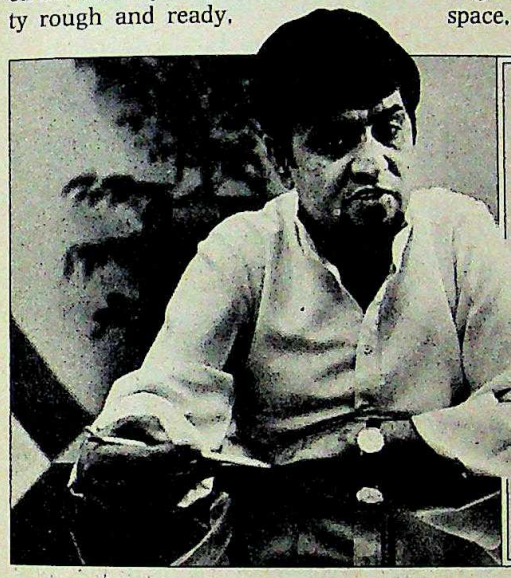
stuff that's preserved and processed for sale is exorbitantly priced, mainly because taxes plus packaging costs account for a whopping 60 per cent of output costs. And with companies using less than 40 per cent of their production capacities on an average, they've never enjoyed the cost savings of mass production.

"The scenario was very grim," says Chopra. "The yield per acre is so low that we have to pay more for fruits and vegetables. Therefore, the price of our products is very high." Official statistics on the industry are pretty rough and ready,



"In just two months, we have had practically every well-known company in the country approaching us."

JAGDISH TYTLER
minister of state for food processing

but they do back Chopra's claim. Fresh pineapples cost 50 paise per kg in many foreign countries where they grow; in India they cost two to three times as much. "Moreover," points out Utsav Dhupelia, president of the Bombay-based Foods and Inns Ltd, "the Government always considered the processed foods industry a luxury, not a necessity."

Evidently, the Government has done some hard rethinking, and for reasons that embrace more than just the industry. As Jagdish Tytler puts it: "We thought of a few major things: the need to generate rural employment—everyone wants to become babus in towns because there are not enough jobs—and the necessity of farmers getting better value for their produce." Tytler also talks expansively of the vast agricultural and marine wealth that lies untapped. "We can export Rs 2,000 crore worth of fish alone," says the minister.

The policy must not be viewed in isolation, however. It's part of a wider package that aims at revolutionising the Indian countryside. Not very long ago, the Government allowed hybrid seeds to be freely imported, and Tytler here cites the Turkish experience. "Seven years ago, Turkey used to import fruits and vegetables. Today, with new technology, it exports $1 billion worth of them. It now produces and exports seeds valued at $1 billion."

Obviously, the official game plan is to cobble together a grand alliance of corporations and farmers in an effort at harnessing the nation's wealth, both for exports and the domestic market. So the Government eagerly lends an ear to Lipton when it shows how farm produce is grown abroad in tiny amounts of space, and coaxes companies such as Hindustan Cocoa Products (formerly known as Cadbury's), and Amul to encourage farmers to grow cocoa amidst coconuts. In fact, Hindustan Cocoa Chairman and Managing Director C.Y. Pal met Food Processing Ministry Secretary, P.Murari on August 8 in this connection. The chocolate manufacturer has now submitted a proposal to the Government that envisages annual cocoa exports of Rs 250 crore by 2000 A.D. The plan hinges on jacking up the country's annual cocoa output from about 6,000 tonnes to an ambitious 1 lakh tonnes, and is based on the chocolate companies encouraging growers to inter-crop cocoa with coconut and arecanut trees.

Before the processing industry can bloom, however, the stratospherically high tax rates have to be pruned. Early last month, Tytler's ministry forwarded to the Finance Ministry a set of sweeping tax recommendations. These include tax holidays for companies that set up shop in rural areas, drastic cuts in the duty on finished products, bottles, and cartons and on refrigerated equipment for cold storages and trucks, and tax incentives for corporate expenditure on agricultural extension work.

While these will be a bonanza for companies, the Government is trying to figure out ways of ensuring that tax cuts lead to lower retail prices. Enter an "excise duty drawback" scheme, where excise relief will be linked with a product's printed price. "One of the options being examined is to provide excise relief at the last point of sale," says a government functionary. "The only way to ensure that the relief is passed on is to give relief on the printed price."

Despite the collective back slapping, the policy has its fair share of critics. The most trenchant criticism comes from Parle's Ramesh Chauhan, who fought a bitter rearguard action to prevent the entry of Pepsico. "The new policy has opened up the sector to big business. But look at the experience of those who're already in," says Chauhan. "Cadbury's had to close an apple juice plant, Wimco's juice plant is running at a loss, Kissan and Dipy's are reportedly up for sale. These are all big companies. So why did they fail? Rather than encouraging the food processing industry, the policy might lead to more closed plants."

That's a sobering thought. Big business cannot wave a wand and offer instant solutions. It can at best provide the financial muscle to induct new technologies and marketing skills. In the process, several small enterprises could also be squeezed.

There's little doubt too that organised farmers' cooperatives are needed to eliminate exploitative middlemen. But when the indigenous experience has been excellent, why rope in foreigners to organise cooperatives? "There is no need at all for this. The Anand experiment has shown that India can do it, and do it better," says Dhupelia.

Finally, a policy by itself cannot usher in a revolution. This is particularly true of a country with power shortages and tiresome red tape. Says Escorts Managing Director Anil Nanda: "When you look at the infrastructure and the kind of paperwork one has to do, it just puts one off."

Even so, Nanda's bullish about the industry's prospects. "We've the best of crops, the best of weather." With all that, plus a policy going for it, the somnolent food processing industry just might face the sweet taste of success.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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Stillborn Tribunal

TWO years after Parliament passed a law to set up a special judicial body that would deal with tax disputes, it has yet to take off.

The Customs and Revenue Appellate Tribunal was meant to cut litigation over tax assessments. Companies used to obtain stay orders from the high courts, and revenue was blocked. The Government's answer was the tribunal.

So far, the Government has not appointed either the president or members of the tribunal. A Karnataka High Court judge who was offered the top slot declined the honour. Not much has been done since then to fill the posts. Whatever happened to the Government that works faster?

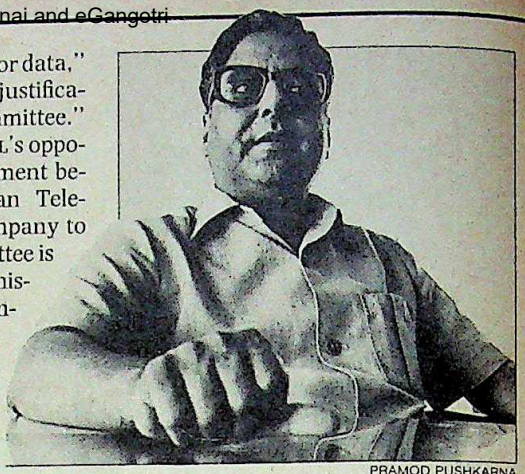
When the Chips are Down

IT was supposed to spearhead the electronics revolution. But four years after going into production, the state-owned Semiconductor Complex Ltd (SCL) is being accused of not having lived up to its promise. The Electronics Commission has asked the Department of Electronics to form a committee to review the Chandigarh-based chip company's functioning. The move follows a closed-door meeting last June, when the commission discussed SCL's performance—while company Chairman and Managing Director Virendra Mohan cooled his heels outside.

Among the issues of contention are SCL's limited production of large scale integrated (LSI) devices. In 1987-88, SCL's sales totalled Rs 13.40 crore, with LSI devices accounting for less than 50 per cent of this. The rest of the turnover came mostly from clock and watch modules and educational computers.

SCL, however, counters that it must be judged by the yardsticks laid down in the Cabinet-approved detailed project report, and in terms of the number of chips produced—though not in value terms—it is ahead of the report's targets. And sales of chip devices have failed to take off because customers downstream such as the telecommunications industry blossomed late. "The least the Electronics Commission could have done was to ask us for data," says SCL's Mohan. "There's no justification for anyone to appoint a committee."

The ballyhoo is rooted in SCL's opposition to a collaboration agreement between the state-owned Indian Telephone Industries and a US company to manufacture chips. The committee is perhaps the Electronics Commission's riposte to SCL. The chip company, however, may not take all this lying down. Late last fortnight, there was some speculation that the committee would not be formed after all.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

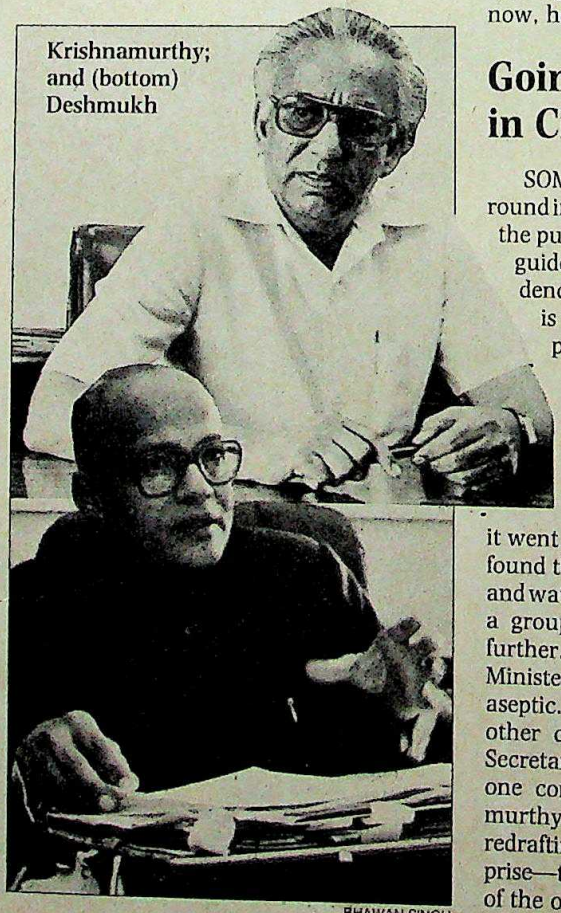
Mohan: fighting to stay up

Giving a Look Over

THE Industry Ministry's Directorate-General of Technical Development (DGTD) may not be around for much longer. For, the Government has commissioned the National Productivity Council to study the usefulness of the DGTD.

The Government has been mulling over DGTD's role for some time. With pruning pressures building up, there has been some talk of dismantling the organisation and spinning off its mini-directorates to other ministries.

The Government has also not appointed a director-general for DGTD after P. R. Latey retired months ago. A committee headed by Planning Commission member Abid Hussain was set up to pick a new head. It came up with two names: K.V. Swaminathan, adviser in the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and S.K. Gupta, director of the Steel Authority of India's Research and Development Centre at Ranchi. Right now, however, both names are on ice.



Krishnamurthy; and (bottom) Deshmukh

BHAWAN SINGH

Going Around in Circles

SOMETIMES, the Government goes round in circles. Take the white paper on the public sector. It sought to draw up guidelines granting more independence to state companies. The paper is the handiwork of a number of public sector heads, led by Steel Authority of India's Chairman V. Krishnamurthy. And it's now returned to the drawing-boards.

Over a year ago, a draft of the paper did the rounds. First, it went to a committee of secretaries. It found the recommendations too strong and watered them down. Next, it went to a group of ministers. They diluted it further. When it finally reached Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, it had become aseptic. Gandhi has now sent it to another committee, headed by Cabinet Secretary B.G. Deshmukh. Ironically, one committee member: V. Krishnamurthy. The committee is now busy redrafting the paper. Surprise, surprise—the new version will restore most of the original recommendations.

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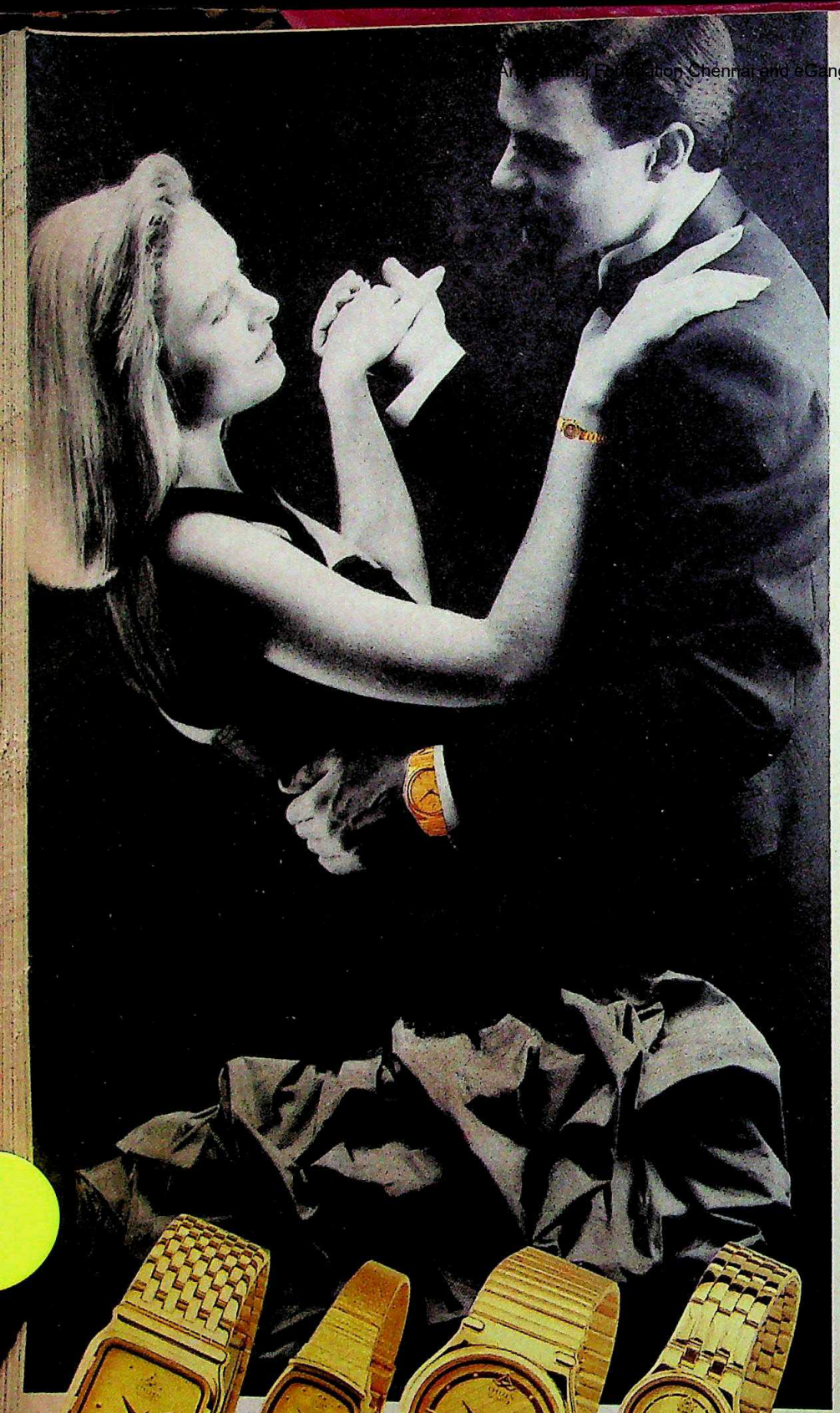

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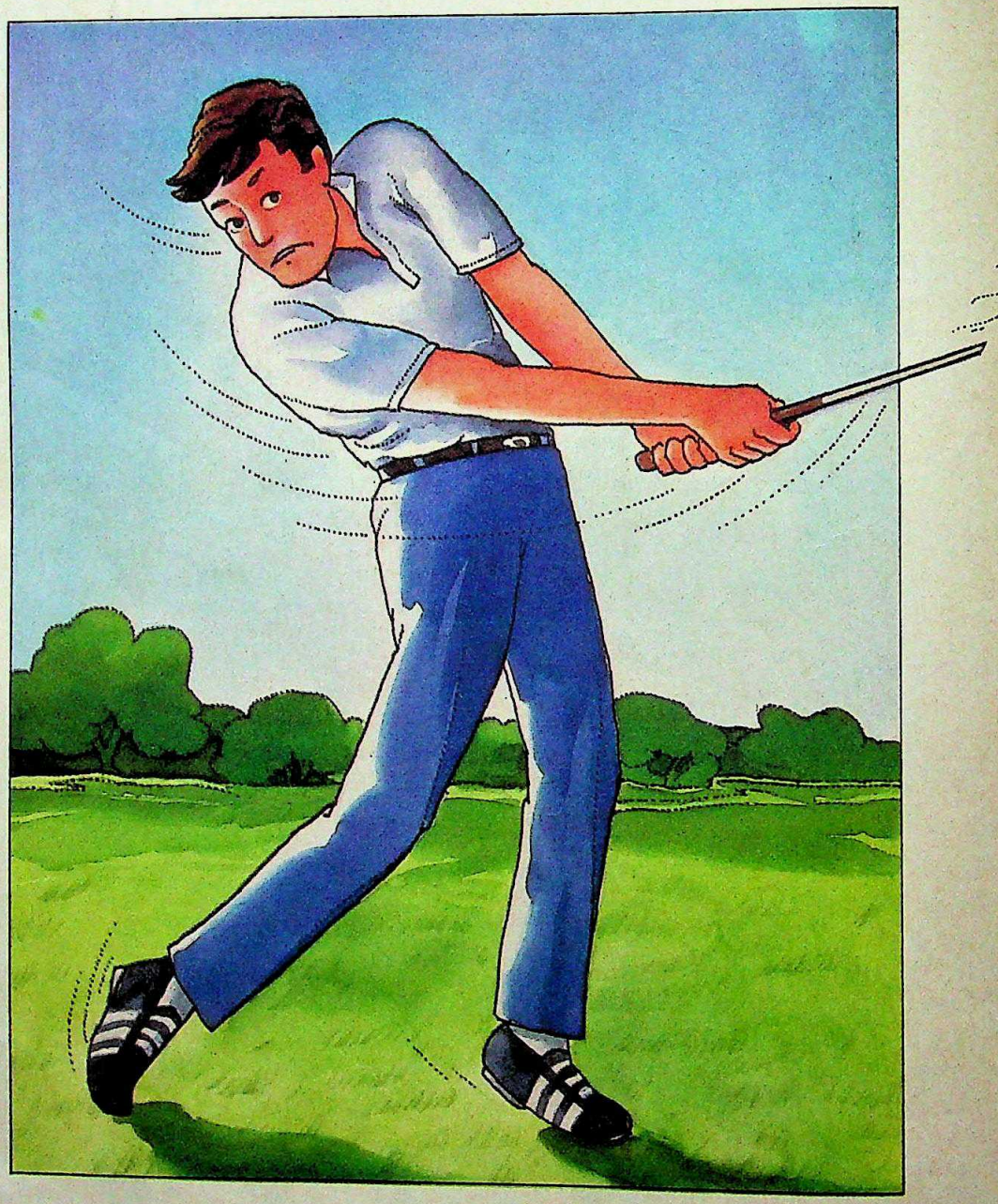

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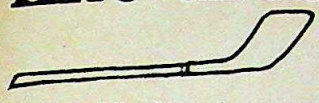

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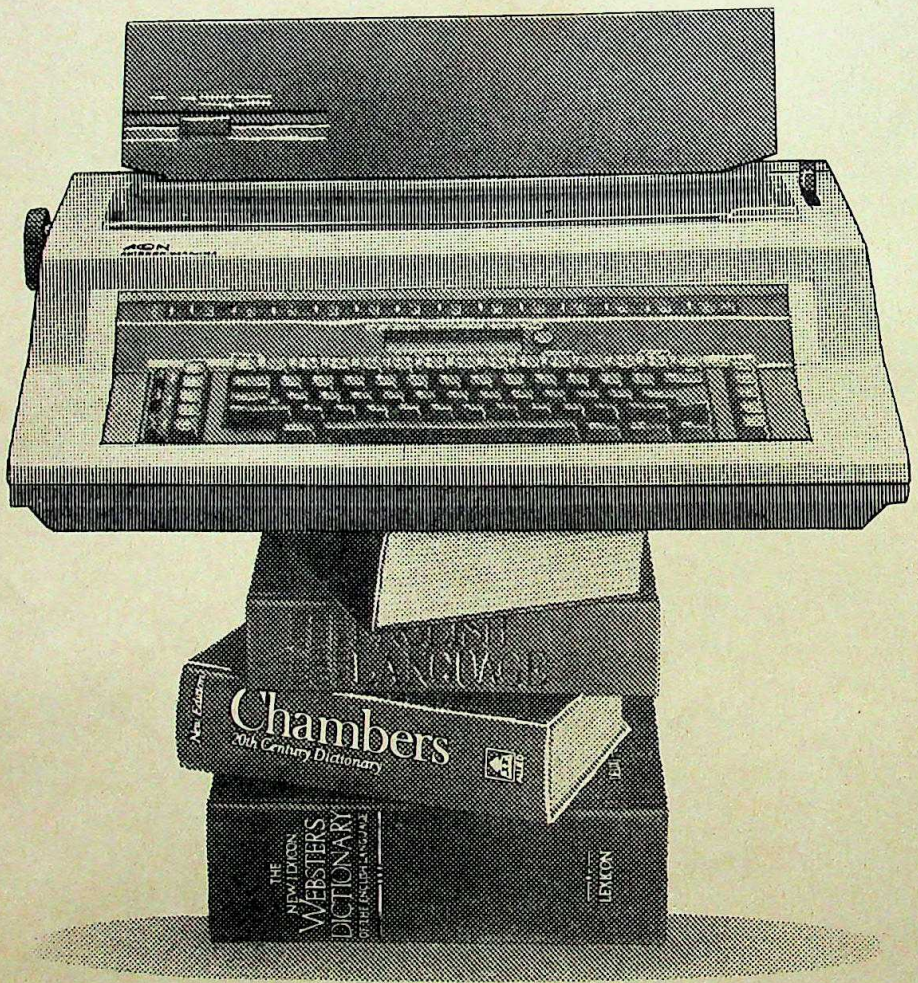

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Good monsoons and the anticipation of a good crop have kept wholesale prices well under control but consumer prices need to be watched carefully.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

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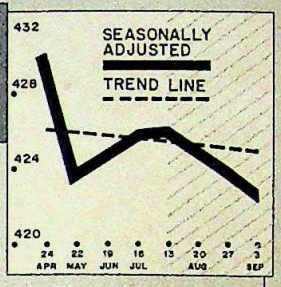
Current Trend
— .75% p.a.

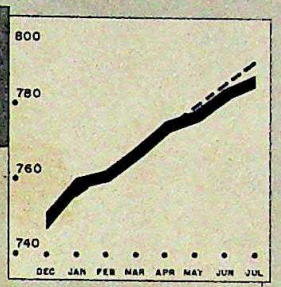


The wholesale price index has been on a declining trend since April. Last fortnight prices fell by 0.5 per cent.

Consumer Price Index

1980 = 100

Current Trend
9.1% p.a.

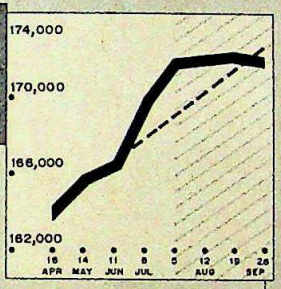


Unlike wholesale prices, consumer prices continue their fairly sharp upward movement. The index rose by 0.5 per cent last month.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.6% p.a.

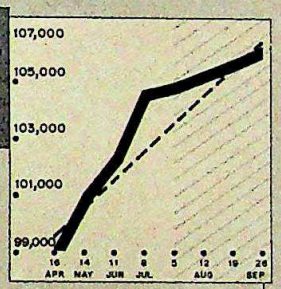


There has been no significant change in the trend in money supply during the last fortnight which marked a 0.03 per cent decline.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
18.1% p.a.

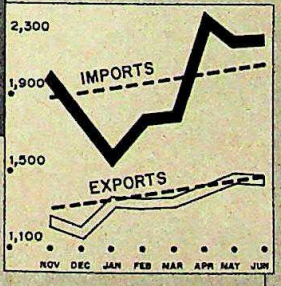


Commercial credit conditions have not been tight this year. Last fortnight saw a further increase of 0.8 per cent.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
21.2% p.a.
EXPORTS
15% p.a.
IMPORTS

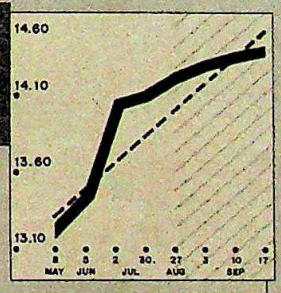


The long-term growth in the imports bill is being arrested. Last month there was only a small increase of 0.2 per cent in the value of imports.

Foreign Exchange Rate

Spot Rs/$

Current Trend
23.8% p.a.

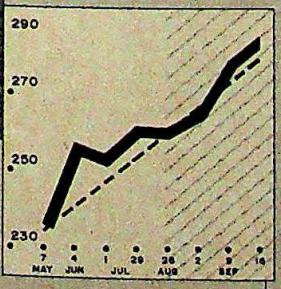


Devaluation of the rupee against the US dollar continues. The dollar became costlier by 0.6 per cent last fortnight. Exporters should benefit.

Share Price Index

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
47.7% p.a.

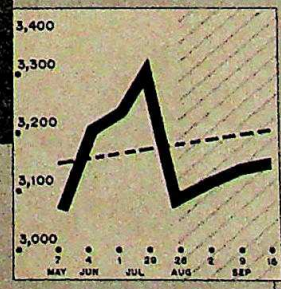


The share market remains buoyant with a 7.2 per cent increase registered over the last fortnight.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
5% p.a.



Gold prices demonstrated a sharp upward turn during the last fortnight with a 1.1 per cent increase.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the 2nd fortnight of August, 1988

	% Growth
Oranges	6.83
Cotton Raw	4.65
Bananas	3.93
Urad	3.83
Chillies	2.80
Gram	2.33
Jowar	2.20
Cotton Yarn	1.09
Gur	0.74
Onions	0.67
Coconut	0
Machine Tools	0
Coir Yarn	0
Nitrogenous Fertiliser	0
Plywood	0
Tractors	0
Zinc	0
Handloom and Powerloom products	0
Rubber	0
Lubricating Oil	0
Milk	0
Pipes and Tubes	0
Hides (raw)	0
Tobacco & Other Tobacco Products	0
Country Liquor	0
Art Silk and Artificial Yarn	-0.08
Wheat	-0.80
Gingelly Oil	-0.86
Turmeric	-1.31
Coffee	-1.47
Coconut Oil	-1.57
Ragi	-1.62
Tea	-1.68
Masoor	-1.80
Fish	-1.83
Mustard Oil	-1.84
Cement	-2.03
Arhar	-2.22
Sugar	-2.43
Moong	-2.47
Barley	-2.54
Maize	-4.12
Solvent Extracted Oil	-6.83
Bajra	-7.23
Groundnut Oil	-8.4

Of the 139 series considered, 10 of them with total weight of 12.671 had a positive growth and 20 of them with a total weight of 12.627 had a negative growth. 109 of them showed no growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Petroleum		
Thousand Tonnes, August	2653	2567
Petroleum Refinery Products		
Thousand Tonnes, August	4055	4317
Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, August	44.9	51.5
Letter of Intents Issued		
Numbers, July	62	84
Industrial Licences Issued		
Numbers, July	33	48

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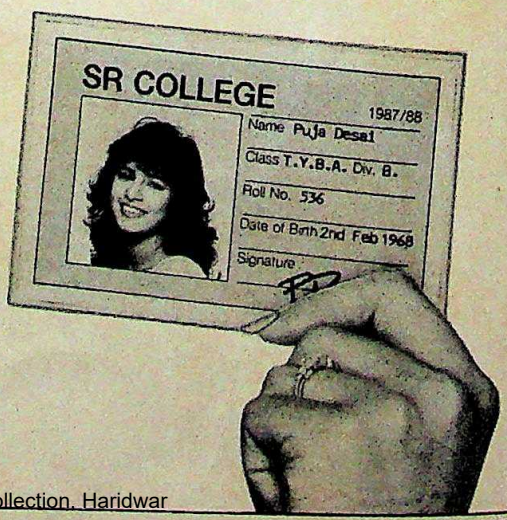

Look for this sign...

Photophone's IN-A-SNAP CENTRE

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THE MARKETS

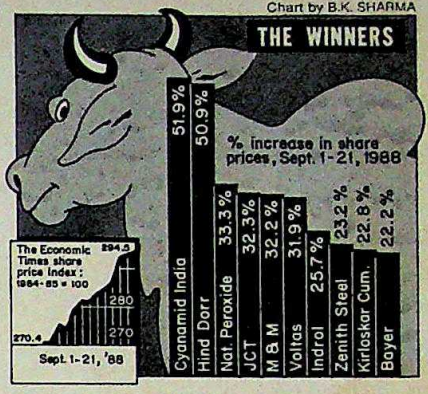
Good Times

Share prices touch a new high

THE good times are back with a bang. Share prices are soaring to new heights, while price records tumble within days as new records are set. And many share issues of even new companies are being oversubscribed. This is significant because the so-called primary or new issues market has long been in the dumps.

Clearly, a boom is in the making, and it's no flash in the pan. Last fortnight, prices of a range of scrips such as Cynamid India, Hindustan Dorr-Oliver and Mahindra and Mahindra shot up by between 52 per cent and 32 per cent. Even shares of concerns such as National Rayon, Punjab Tractors and Bharat Bijlee, all of which are not regarded as high fliers on the market, witnessed rapid gains. Indeed, so quick was the price spurt that on September 19, the Bombay Stock Exchange had to revise the upper price bands for trading in eight scrips.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



In step with the upswing, share indices shattered records for the year. *The Economic Times* index of share prices climbed first from 275 in early September to 293.1 by the middle of the month. That's well above last year's peak of 276.3. But the index did not stay put here. It moved up sharply still further to 294.5. In fact, in just three days of trading the index climbed by as much as eight points.

What explains the price surge? For the first time in months, demand is outstripping supply. A lot of cash is floating around with the financial institutions, and they have been buying large amounts of scrips. There are signs too that even the average investor, who had long stayed away from the stock markets, is buying shares again—even if selectively. And the total stock of blue chips is limited.

A lot of market men believe that 1988 is different from 1985. The earlier boom was underpinned by speculation, and saw some unfulfilled expectations: several small companies that hit the market for the first time failed to perform satisfactorily. This time the markets are reflecting the realities on the ground. The heads of both the Unit Trust of India and the Industrial Development Bank of India have publicly voiced their confidence in the economy—a stand that has been cautiously endorsed by the Reserve Bank of India in its annual report.

A few official moves have also served to pep up the markets: price increases for levy cement and drugs, and a new policy package for the food processing industry.

The question that is being increasingly voiced now is: just how high will the markets climb? Right now, no one knows. But the next few weeks should provide some answers.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	1988 LOW	1988 CLOSE 5.9.88	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	51.25	30.25	51.00	2.00 +
Associated Cement	278.00	128.50	263.00	8.00 +
Atlas Copco	63.50	33.50	51.50	1.00 +
Asian Paints	178.75	128.75	175.00	nil
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	290.00	25.00 +
Baroda Rayon	315.00	140.00	300.00	61.00 +
Bata India	77.25	50.50	69.00	5.00 +
Bharat Forge	150.00	101.00	146.00	5.00 +
Birla Jute	48.50	32.25	48.00	4.50 +
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	38.00	2.00 +
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	119.00	9.00 +
Britannia Ind.	109.00	75.00	92.50	7.50 +
Brooke Bond	104.00	75.00	102.00	4.50 +
Century Spinning	1105.00	617.50	1040.00	5.00 −
Chloride India	80.50	59.00	68.00	nil
Colgate	272.50	160.00	266.25	20.00 +
Cyanamid	62.50	33.00	60.00	18.50 +
DCM	47.50	28.00	42.12	5.62 +
Dunlop	86.50	66.00	71.00	1.00 +
E.I. Hotels	54.00	38.00	52.00	2.00 +*
Escorts	57.00	37.00	56.00	5.25 +
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	287.50	17.50 +
Food Specialities	156.50	93.50	153.50	4.50 +
Garware Nylon	49.00	20.00	45.00	1.00 −
G.E. Shipping	34.00	20.80	32.25	2.75 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	162.00	75.00	161.00	13.50 +
Grasim Ind.	111.00	81.50	108.00	2.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	139.00	73.00	106.00	5.00 +
Hind. Ciba	565.00	332.50	565.00	25.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	99.00	9.00 +
Hindustan Lever	81.00	59.50	73.00	0.75 +
Hindustan Motors	29.25	15.80	26.70	0.50 +
IEL	43.75	31.00	38.50	1.50 +*
Indian Organic	35.00	15.00	31.50	nil
Indian Rayon	75.00	46.00	69.50	2.50 +
Indrol	225.00	133.75	213.75	45.00 +
Ingersoll-Rand	335.00	205.00	322.50	47.50 +
ITC	49.75	30.00	49.50	4.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	75.50	45.50	75.50	2.50 +*
Kinetic Engineering	285.00	161.25	257.50	15.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	80.00	48.00	70.00	13.00 +
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	285.00	5.00 −
Larsen & Toubro	127.50	75.50	123.50	14.00 +
Lipton	69.00	52.00	67.50	2.00 +
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	13.00	1.00 +
Madura Coats	80.00	59.00	79.00	8.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	78.00	48.50	78.00	13.00 +
Milk Food	220.00	72.50	212.50	22.50 +
Motor Industries	650.00	447.50	640.00	20.00 +
Mukand Iron	97.00	72.50	94.00	4.00 +
National Organic	694.00	390.00	665.00	32.50 +
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	10.50	2.25 +
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	32.75	4.75 +
Pelco Electronics	37.00	24.50	28.75	0.25 −
Pfizer	79.50	50.00	61.00	nil
Premier Auto	39.50	23.00	35.00	4.50 +
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	71.50	1.50 +
Raymond	96.00	41.50	59.00	1.50 +*
Reckitt & Colman	227.00	120.00	134.00	87.00 −**
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	195.00	10.00 −***
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	57.50	1.00 +
Shriram Fibres	62.50	32.50	51.50	3.75 +
Siemens India	89.00	56.00	85.00	4.50 +
SKF Bearings	1690.00	1058.00	1640.00	180.00 +
SPIC	60.25	23.50	48.25	0.25 +
Tata Steel	922.50	568.75	911.25	26.25 +
Telco	755.00	340.00	737.50	37.50 +
Vam Organic	103.00	75.00	93.00	0.50 −
Voltas	500.00	225.00	445.00	100.00 +
Wimco	24.00	11.00	19.50	2.50 +

*Ex-dividend **Ex-bonus ***Spot delivery

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	11.4000	11.3500
Austria	Schilling	1	1.1133	1.0979
Bahrain	Dinar	1	38.5336	38.4990
Bangladesh	Taka	100	46.7622	46.5122
Canada	Dollar	1	12.0196	11.8928
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.0406	2.0178
Egypt	Pound	1	6.1036	6.0528
France	Franc	1	2.3364	2.2779
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.8757	1.8565
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0836	0.0800
Iran	Rial	100	20.6932	20.6026
Italy	Lira	100	1.0426	1.0000
Japan	Yen	100	11.0619	10.7875
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7940	0.7662
Kuwait	Dinar	1	50.9233	50.8128
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.4948	5.4370
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0350	1.0000
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6522	0.6400
Netherlands	Guilder	1	6.9358	6.8589
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.7422	0.7026
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.1805	7.1042
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1162	0.1029
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4222	0.4026
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.2786	2.2520
Switzerland	Franc	1	9.2570	9.1601
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1420	0.1384
Thailand	Baht	100	57.6228	57.5722
UK	Pound	1	24.4260	24.2829
USA	Dollar	1	14.6520	14.5033
UAE	Dirham	1	3.9622	3.9028
USSR	Rouble	1	22.03	21.95
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	7.9302	7.7340

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 22.9.88.

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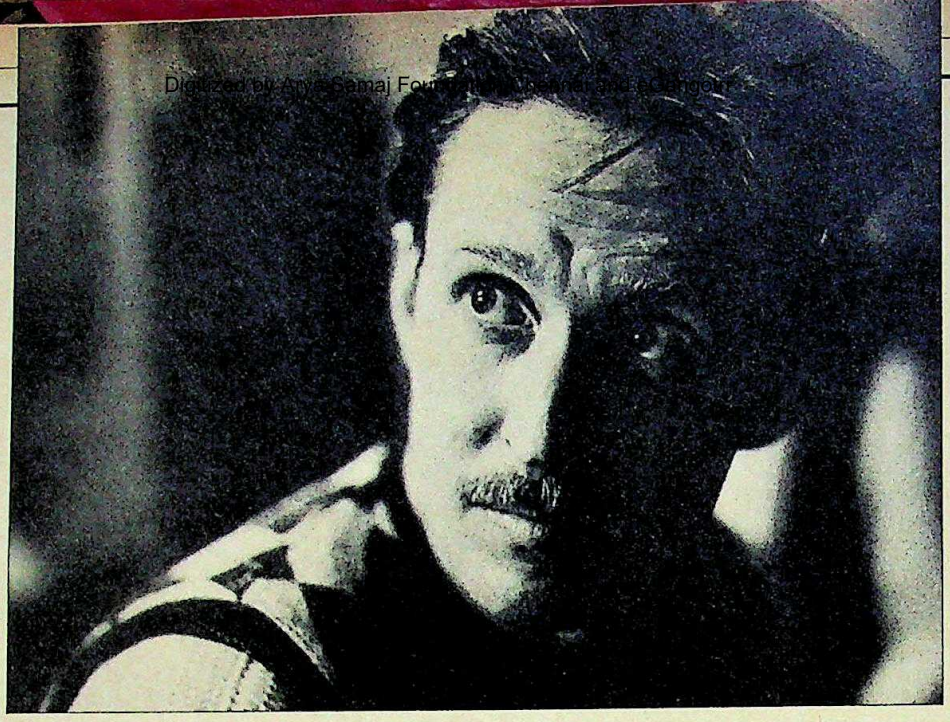

TOM ALTER

A Man for All Seasons

The actor's new role is as sports pundit on the small screen

WHO was that man? Suddenly, last month, a new sports pundit appeared on the television horizon and had the nation puzzled. To begin with, there was something different about the man. He was blond. He had that all-American-boy-look complete with freckles and sandy hair. But there was something which did not quite fit the picture: something *deja vu* about this affable compere of the much-praised three part television series, "The Olympics Curtain Raiser. Swifter, Higher, Stronger." Moreover, he spoke Hindi like a native.

As well he ought. For Tom Alter, "38 going on 28", is a native. The son and grandson of American missionaries in India, he grew up in Dehradun and in the Mussoorie Hills. He is a welcome alternative on the sports scene. Alter's own track record, however, has been on another, quite different field: the Bombay cinema. Hence the familiarity of his face on the small screen. Veteran of a 100 films—65 of which have been released—Alter's roles have been limited by the colour of his skin. From the British officer (*Shatranj ke Khilari, Junoon, Kranti*) or Interpol policeman (*Charas*) of British India to the *angrez* pot-boiler-smuggler of today's India, he has had to play the exotic outsider—the way Indian actors abroad get the stereotyped brown man roles.

It is finally in the sports arena that Alter gets to play himself. In 1985 he did a series of 12 in-depth articles on personalities in Indian sports for *Sportsweek*. "We did not touch the cricketers. Everybody writes about them. We covered the other sports. We spent many days with personalities like P.T. Usha, Zafar Iqbal, Anita Sood, Adil Sumariwala..."

Alter came into bat again this year with a series of 11 articles on the history of the Olympics for *The Times of India*, and the Olympic series for television. Next on the sports palate is an hour-long video sports magazine which he will script and present for *Sportsweek*. Alter's new and more successful career has been "a dream come true". "I wanted to become a cricketer. When I was growing up my heroes were not Dev Sahib and Raj Kapoor. Milkha Singh and Polly Umrigar were the kings for me. I used to cut out their photographs and paste them in a scrapbook. When I went to interview some of these veterans they were thunderstruck because I could refer to the rain that fell on the particular day that they played a certain game in 1961."

With his entry on to the small screen, Alter's luck appears to be changing. Not only is he now an admired *sportswallah* on television, he will soon be starring in a tele serial, *Jugal Bandi*, a *desi* version of *Miami Vice* to be telecast this November.

Alter has also been carried along by the high tide of mainstream cinema. But, occasionally, he has swum to the islands in the streams. He played the lead role of an Englishman in love with an Indian girl in a small budget film, *Chameli Memsahib*.

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And he has just completed a Bengali film, *Gaja Mukta*, based on a true story, in which a romantic Frenchman falls in love with an Assamese girl. Incidentally, he does his own dubbing in the film: "I speak Bengali after my own fashion. The script is in Devanagri."

Life itself has a double role for Alter. There is the Movie Tom and the Sports Tom. But there is also the American Tom and the *desi* Tom. The American Tom is like the rest of the Alter clan, most of whom went to Woodstock School in Mussoorie. And many of whom still live there. As do his two children and wife, Carol, who is another born-in-India-American. His brother John, a poet, teaches at Woodstock, as did his uncle and his cousins. One of his cousins, Stephen Alter, has written two critically acclaimed novels: *Neglected Lives* and *Silk and Steel*. His sister, Martha Chen, wrote an interesting book on women and development: *Bangladesh, A Quiet Revolution*, and is involved in research on women and development in India. The Alter clan, not too dissimilar to the joint family in India, gathers here each Christmas; and occasionally in Connecticut, US, where the nonagenarian Alters live.

LIKE the other Alters, Tom too went to an Ivy League college in New England; Yale University in his case. But he did not stay too long. He returned to India within a year to teach English in St Thomas's, a missionary school in Jagadhari, Haryana, in 1970. "In that short time I was hooked on India. We had lived in India all our lives but never outside the Woodstock-New Delhi-missionary complex life. During those six months I lived in Jagadhari I knew where Hindi films come from. When the *Bombaywallahs* put their noses up in the air about our cinema being silly, I can say to them that for you yes, but for 600 million other people, Hindi cinema is as real as the sun. This is when I decided to become an actor...I guess the film *Aradhana* did the trick for me."

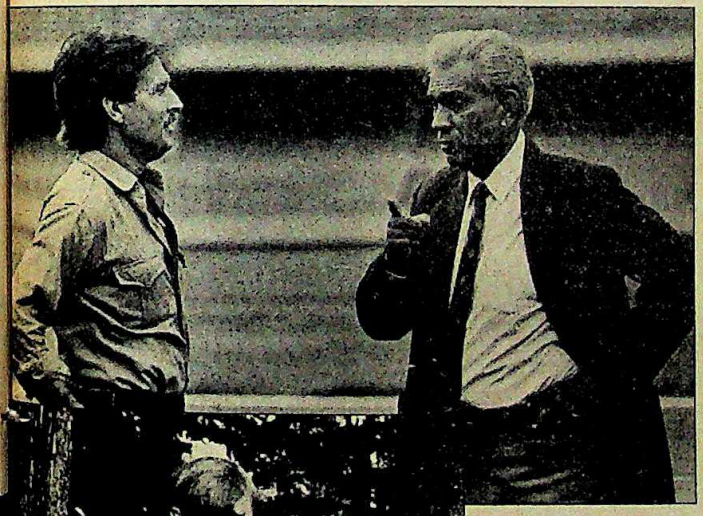
And so to the Pune Film Institute he went in 1972. "*Hero banna tha na* (I had to become a hero)." I had no *matlab* with the camera. Those days you specialised from the moment you entered." Sports was left on the back-burner and Alter was lucky enough to get a role in *Mrig-Trishna* as soon as he graduated from the institute—officer and gentleman, of course. Then came *Sahib Bahadur*, directed by Chetan Anand and starring Dev Anand. The role he enjoyed the most, however, was in Ramanand Sagar's *Charas*: "I played an Interpol officer. In fact, Dharmendra's boss. And whenever I went to Punjab I was treated royally: "*Tusi Dharam de boss ho ji* (You are the boss of Dharmendra)!"

Double lives can be exhausting. And commuting between the Bombay of fast-talking dream merchants and con men and the wholesome little America in the secluded upper reaches of Mussoorie, where the spartan values of his missionary forbears still hold sway, means covering a distance which has to be measured in more than just miles. Alter turns to theatre and of course to sports (almost a religion for most Alters) to keep his "peace of mind" and his various lives in balance. He is one of the founder members of Motley, the theatre group founded in 1979 by fellow graduates of the Film Institute in Pune: Naseeruddin Shah, Benjamin Gilani and Ratna Shah. "I could always head for the hills and relax. Sports, reading, theatre and friends kept me relatively sane in the Bombay madhouse. I took an interest in Urdu and studied with an *ustad* for five years. This way I kept my mind active; in films you don't have to do so."

Despite his emerging apathy to the film industry, Alter still believes that the only real adventures now left are either in sports or in films because there is nothing much left to explore in 1988: "Even the Everest has become a *mamuli si baat* (an ordinary thing to do)." In both games, films and sports, it matters not who you are but what you are. "When that ball comes at you at 90 miles an hour, it doesn't matter who your uncle is. The reality of the man can no longer be hidden. If you are good you are in, if you are bad, you are out. Between thought and action, there is no room for shadow—you'll be out."

That's cricket all right. And so, Alter is finally making a mark in the two *maidans* of cinema and sports.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay



(Clockwise from left) Tom Alter with athletics veteran Henry Rebello; in Attenborough's *Gandhi*; with wife and kids; and in a play: versatile visage

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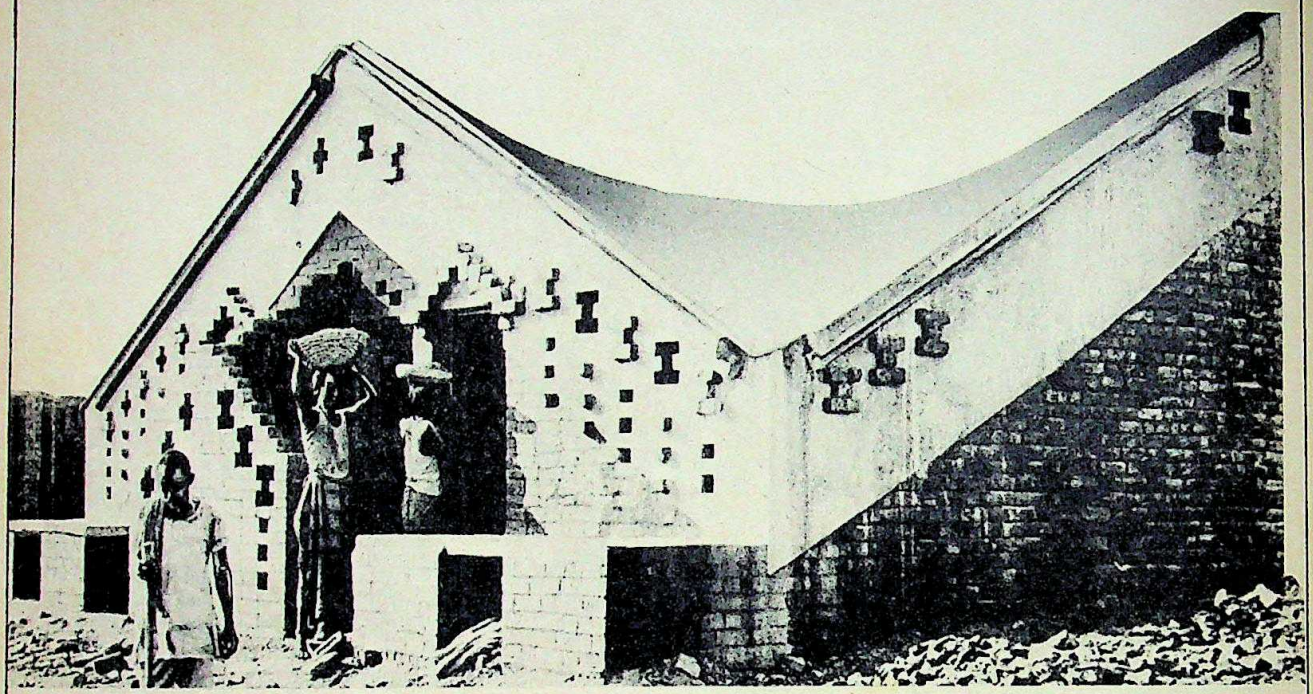
Reaching out to make better housing more affordable for millions



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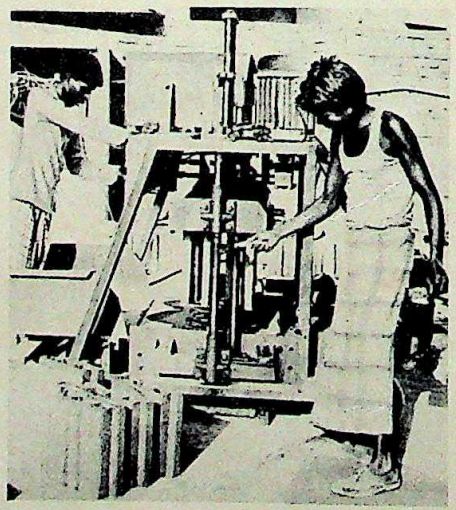

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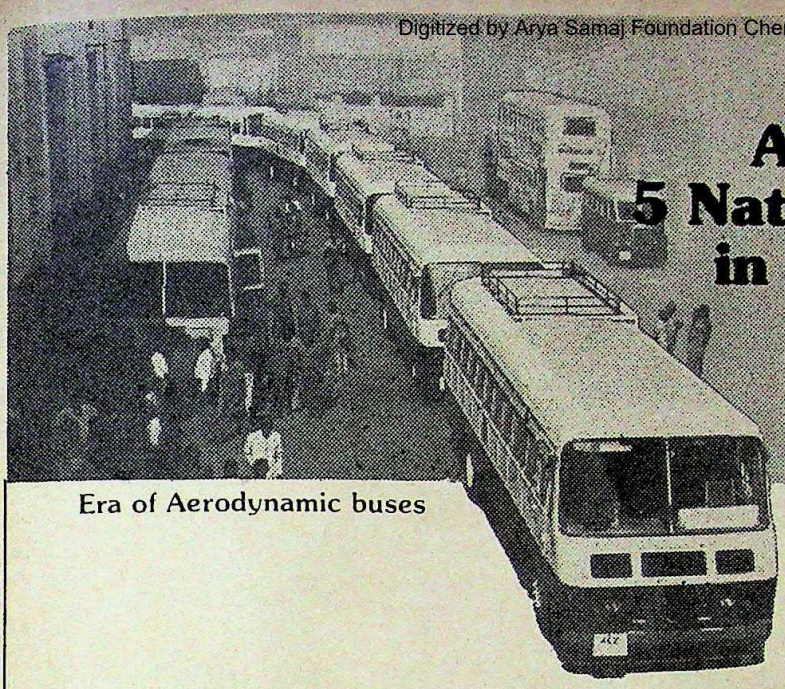

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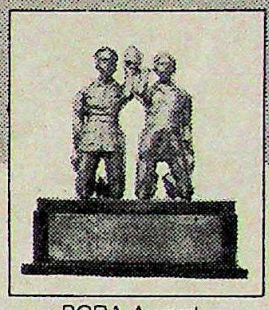

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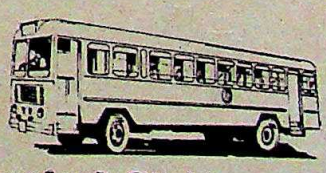

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GUJARAT

Victims of Apathy

Malnutrition claims several children in villages

THREE-year-old Virmal is alive. But only just. Weighing a little over 4.4 kg, and barely having the strength to rise and cling to his impoverished mother, he can neither walk nor crawl. His limbs are like sticks and the ribs are starkly visible.

Two-year-old Lakha's condition is only slightly better. He weighs just 5.5 kg. But it is one-year-old Jayanti's condition that is the worst. Weighing barely 3 kg, he breathes with great difficulty. "It's only a matter of days before we see him dead," says a state Health Department worker in a pained voice.

The cases of Virmal, Lakha and Jayanti are more the order than the exception in over half a dozen villages of Gujarat's Surendranagar district. The children, who are close to death, have two things in common: all of them suffer from acute malnutrition and all of them belong to the tribal Padhar community which resides in the vicinity of the famed Nal Sarovar, the winter home of the migratory birds from Central Asia.

Since August, malnutrition and water-borne diseases have claimed the lives of over 200 children in these villages, most less than six years old. Typically, the state Government reacted late. By the time the state Health Department woke up from its slumber last month, over 125 children had died.

At first the Government tried to pass off the deaths as cholera-related ones but soon it became only too obvious that they had been caused by acute malnutrition. Admitted R. Vala, Surendranagar district health officer: "Due to a high degree of malnutrition, the children have lost their immunity and are vulnerable to diseases."

Prevalent on a large scale in seven villages of Limbdi and Lakhtar talukas, malnutrition has taken a particularly heavy toll in Ranagadh (population 6000) and Nani Katechi (population 4500) villages of Limbdi taluka. Till September 1, as many as 44 children had died in Ranagadh and almost an equal number in Nani Katechi.

It wasn't until August 30 that the state Government was even aware of the deaths. On September 1, district and state Health Department officials hurriedly surveyed the area and a team of doctors and nurses was rushed from Ahmedabad to the villages. Barely a week had elapsed when the team was called back by a state Government which apparently had become satisfied with the emergency measures taken.

The villagers weren't equally pleased. And considering the half-hearted measures taken by the Government, this wasn't surprising. In Nani Katechi village, 36 children died even after emergency steps had been launched. Besides, the state Government's apathy was evident in other ways. Neither Health Minister Vallabhbhai Patel nor Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary had visited the villages till September 25. Said a Congress(I) dissident leader: "It seems as if this government wants to match the insensitivity of the Orissa Government."

It wasn't a wholly unjustified remark. Even as the situation in the villages showed little improvement, medicines, vitamin tablets, fish biscuits and milk powder were yet to reach the areas. Health Officer Vala had been promised adequate quotas of milk powder and fish biscuits before September 10, but these hadn't arrived till September 24.

Health workers have had to face another problem—the Padhars' strong belief in witchcraft. Children continued to die in alarming numbers but many parents refused medical help and instead turned to *Bhuvas* (witch doctors) who have been branding the children in a bid to cure them. On September 4, for instance, health workers tried to treat two-year-old Dhiru but his father declined medical help. Dhiru died five days later. Asks Rajesh Kishore, Surendranagar district collector: "What can we do when they refuse medical treatment?" Kishore has in fact had to seek police help in some cases to compel the Padhars to make use of medical facilities.

Following the events, though, the Government was active in other ways. It suspended three health workers of the area who were popular with the locals. Asks Jitubha Rana, Bharatiya Janata Party leader of Limbdi: "Who is responsible for short supply of medicines? Not the workers. The Health Department has been allowed to go scot-free".

Even more deplorable have been the Government's efforts to bury the whole affair. Now, health workers have been ordered not to report any deaths caused by diseases other than diarrhoea and vomiting. But with the problem of malnutrition still serious, the situation may already have got out of control.

—UDAY MAHURKAR in Surendranagar, Ranagadh and Nani Katechi

A sick child: shocking facts

BHANUBHAI SHUKLA

The state Government tried to pass off the deaths as cholera-related, but soon it was obvious they were caused by malnutrition.

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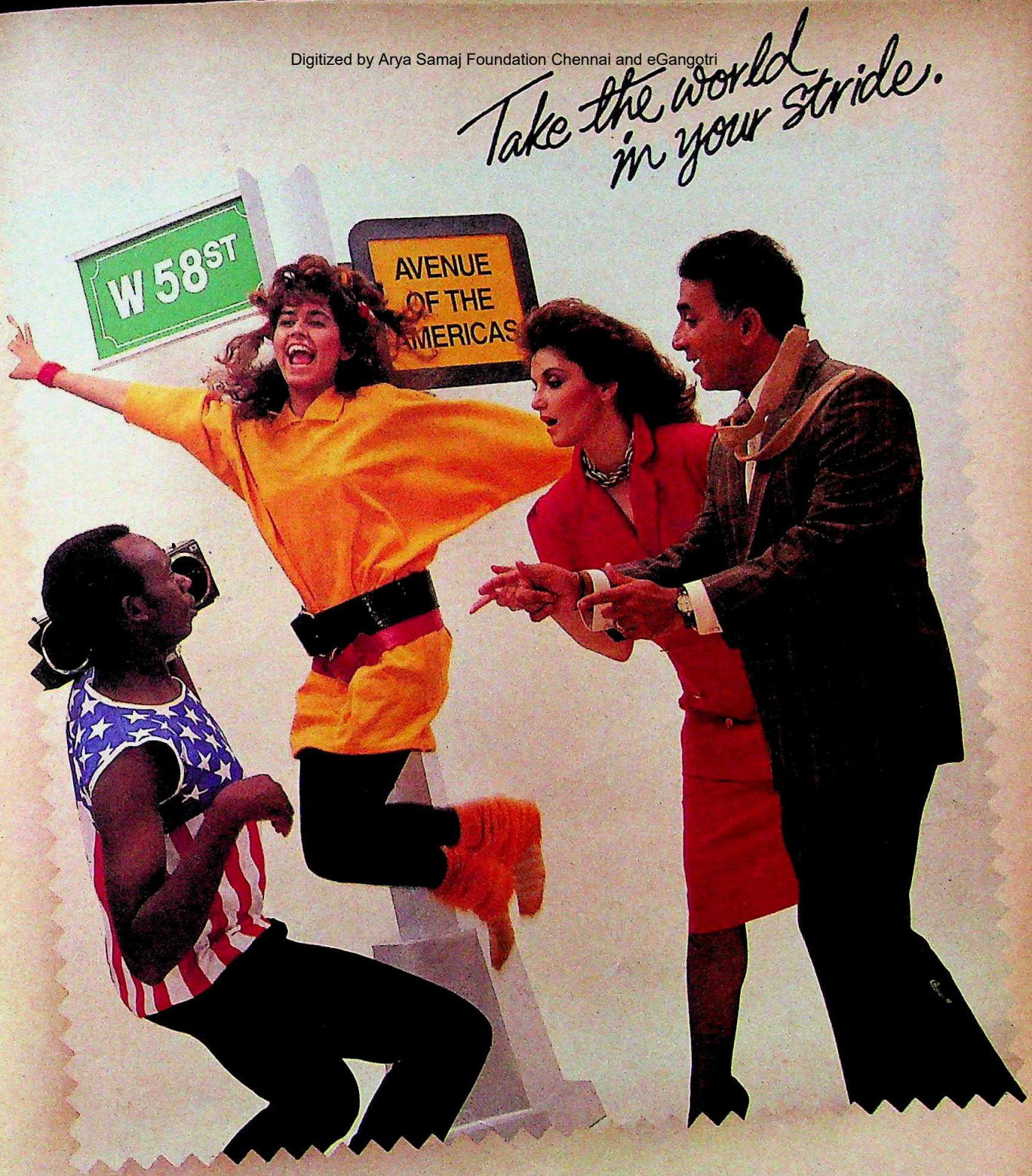

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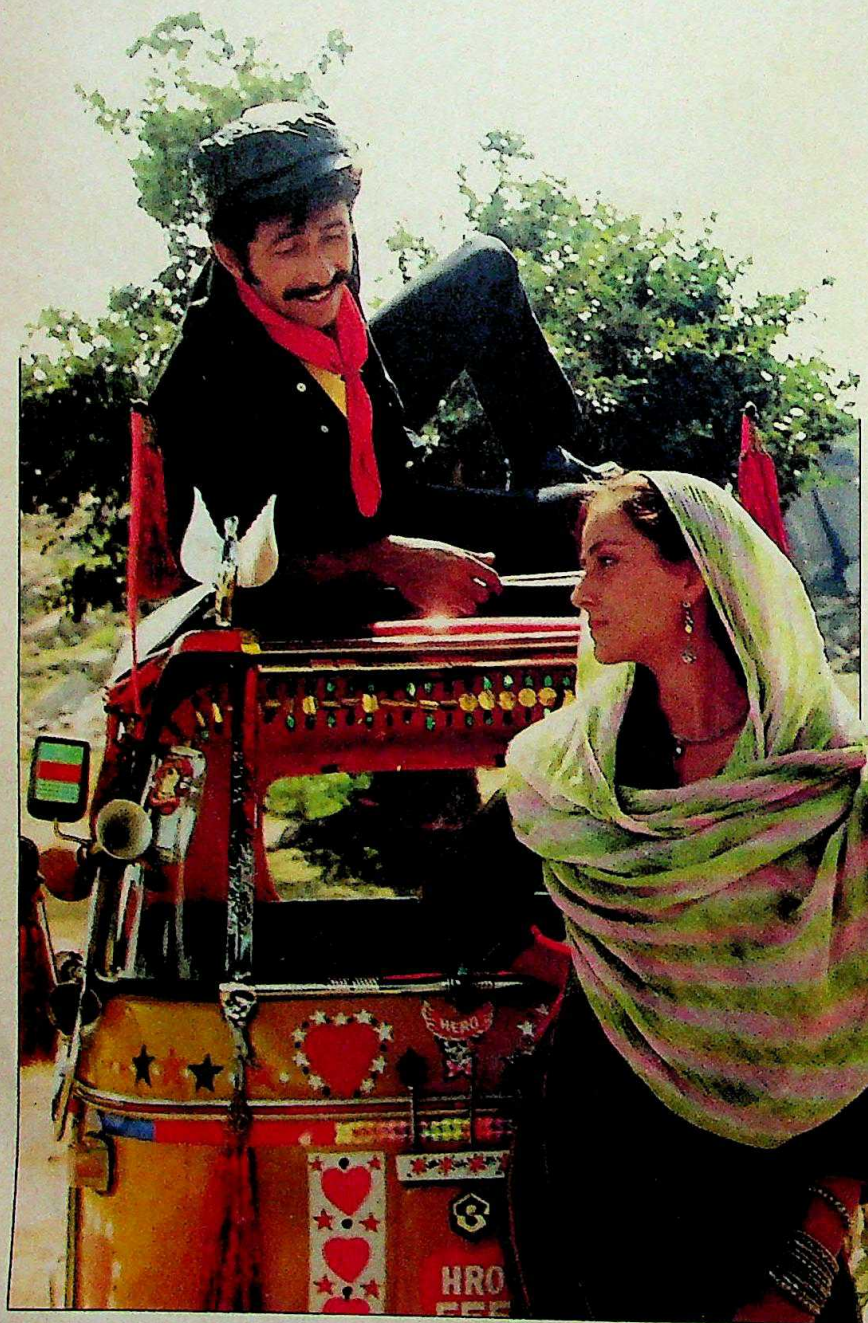
HERO HIRALAL

An Ode to the Common Man

The film unravels a world created by cinematic illusion



HE is the eternally damned, the man in the front row, religiously trooping into crumbling, dank theatres to see every Hindi film, eagerly lapping up the action, easy to impress, quick to protest, the shaky pillar of a vast and floundering empire of flickering dreams. This gay but ghostly presence has now metamorphosed into the magical image on the screen. In Gul Anand's *Hero Hiralal*, directed by Ketan Mehta, the front-row hick has finally turned hero.

"I've made the film for the man in the first row," says Mehta, whose last film *Mirch Masala* received much critical acclaim. "*Hero Hiralal* is for him and about him, about his reality and his fantasies, created partly by cinema."

Mehta straightaway establishes the fairy-tale quality of the film in the opening shot—an old, fortified city rising, as it were, from the deep. Hero Hiralal appears on the screen, emerging appropriately from a huge gash in a cinema hoarding, image breaking out into caricature as he drives a bunch of thugs away with his deadly red scarf. The jaw-crunching swish of the scarf soon unravels a world created by cinematic illusion, the life and times of the lovable, outrageously foppish Hero Hiralal, played with great aplomb by, who else, Naseeruddin Shah.

Hiralal is a rakish small-town rickshaw driver, a street artiste addicted to and inspired by the products of Bombay's dream factories. He sees every Hindi film 'first day, first show', and seems to be engaged continuously in a burlesque road show on his gaily decorated autorickshaw (HRO 555). At the centre of this pastiche of life is a compulsive vision—the ethereally beautiful heroine clad in white floating down towards the star-struck rickshawwallah. She is beautiful, she is virginal, she is the stuff of dreams. As Hiralal's sidekick, hoarding painter Rangila (Mohan Gokhale) says: "God must have seen a lot of films before he made her."

Into this world of playful fantasy enters Rupa (Sanjna Kapoor, in a case of perfect casting), a starlet with a film unit shooting yet another dacoit drama in the rocky environs of Hyderabad. She is straight out of the rickshawwallah's daydreams, and a gauche Hiralal is quick to seize the opportunity to show her around the city. But the fantasy of true love beyond the arc

Shah and Kapoor in the film

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lights is quickly dimmed. Hiralal suddenly discovers one morning that the film unit has disappeared.

That's when the trouble begins, not just for Hiralal, but for the film also. In a film which he calls "an ode to the audience", Mehta is clearly focusing on two main fantasies which he recognises as universally shared by everyone brought up on cinema: the dream of falling in love with a star, and of sacrificing everything, even one's life, for the Great Love. These are omnipotent fantasies, and fortunately most people never go so far as to actually act them out. But not the saucy Hiralal.

Hiralal pursues the starlet to Bombay on his autorickshaw, is predictably spurned, and attempts to kill himself by walking into the sea. But at the last moment Hiralal decides to convert his death into the Grand Gesture. And so he signs himself on with Rani Sitara Devi (Deepa Sahi), the "queen of showbusiness" who makes and breaks stars with her publicity empire.

But with Hiralal she strikes a different kind of deal. The rickshaw driver wants to enact a memorable death, and Sitara Devi decides to make a fortune by promoting the spurned lover's suicide as a media event.

EVERYBODY knows, though, that the front row film-buff loves happy endings. So the inevitable last minute dash to save the drowning hero, with Amitabh Bachchan once again appearing as Amitabh Bachchan in a Gul Anand film to complete the last leg of the race.

The second half of the film owes much to a one-act play by Gujarati writer Naushil Mehta, who wrote the film's story. But it is so different in approach from the first half set in Hyderabad that *Hero Hiralal* appears almost like two films in one. The first half is a delightful introduction to a familiar small-town character shaped by an excess of Hindi cinema. Naseer takes on the role of the *bon vivant* film-buff with relish, and Hriday Lani's pithy dialogue adds to the thrust and sparkle of the plot. The presence of the film unit on location allows for the recreation of some enjoyable stereotypes from the film business—Kiran Kumar as the lecherous, insufferable hero and Satish Shah as the nervous, brief-case clutching producer.

Shah in action: dreamy fare

Sadly, as with so many other "new cinema" directors, Mehta turns from satire to radical social comment, a change of gear which seems to throw the core of the film into chaos. Mehta sees *Hero Hiralal* as "a voyage into the concept of the hero—what it means and what it costs". In the first half, this exploration is satirical and specific, and it would have been interesting to see how the rickshaw driver's fantasy world copes with disillusionment within the reality of his own small-town life. But in the second half, the film moves on to Bombay, and on to an allegorical plane, with Sitara Devi symbolising that "fantastic world of Hindi cinema which converts dreams and fantasies, and the hero, into commodities".

But neither the script nor the production values can quite sustain such an ambitious critique of the film industry. *Hero Hiralal* becomes a jumble of ideas and incredible action, with the happy ending as the sad denouement.

Mehta wanted to make a film on a film-buff for a long time, and with Gul Anand's latest project the opportunity came his way along with the biggest budget (Rs 70 lakh) that he has worked with so far. Both *Bhavni Bhavai*, his first film, and *Holi*, were made for just Rs 9 lakh each, while *Mirch Masala*, which won a national award, cost Rs 20 lakh. Unlike the earlier films, *Hero Hiralal* will get a national theatrical release this month.

Mehta is mid-way through his first major television serial, *Mr Yogi*, a satire on arranged marriages which Mudra plans to telecast later this year. He is also trying to raise money for an ambitious, big budget film starring Amitabh Bachchan. *Kartoos*, set in 1857 and based on the life of the rebel Mangal Pandey, will take more than Rs 2 crore to make. Since Bachchan's distributors may not back the film with the same kind of money they put on a Manmohan Desai extravaganza, Mehta is now hunting for finance in the international market.

In a way, Ketan Mehta's latest project highlights the fact that young film makers are striving to break out of the old ghetto labelled "art cinema". *Hero Hiralal*, a television serial and then a Bachchan film—no film-buff could have fantasised such a variety of genres for the talented product of the new cinema movement.

—M. RAHMAN

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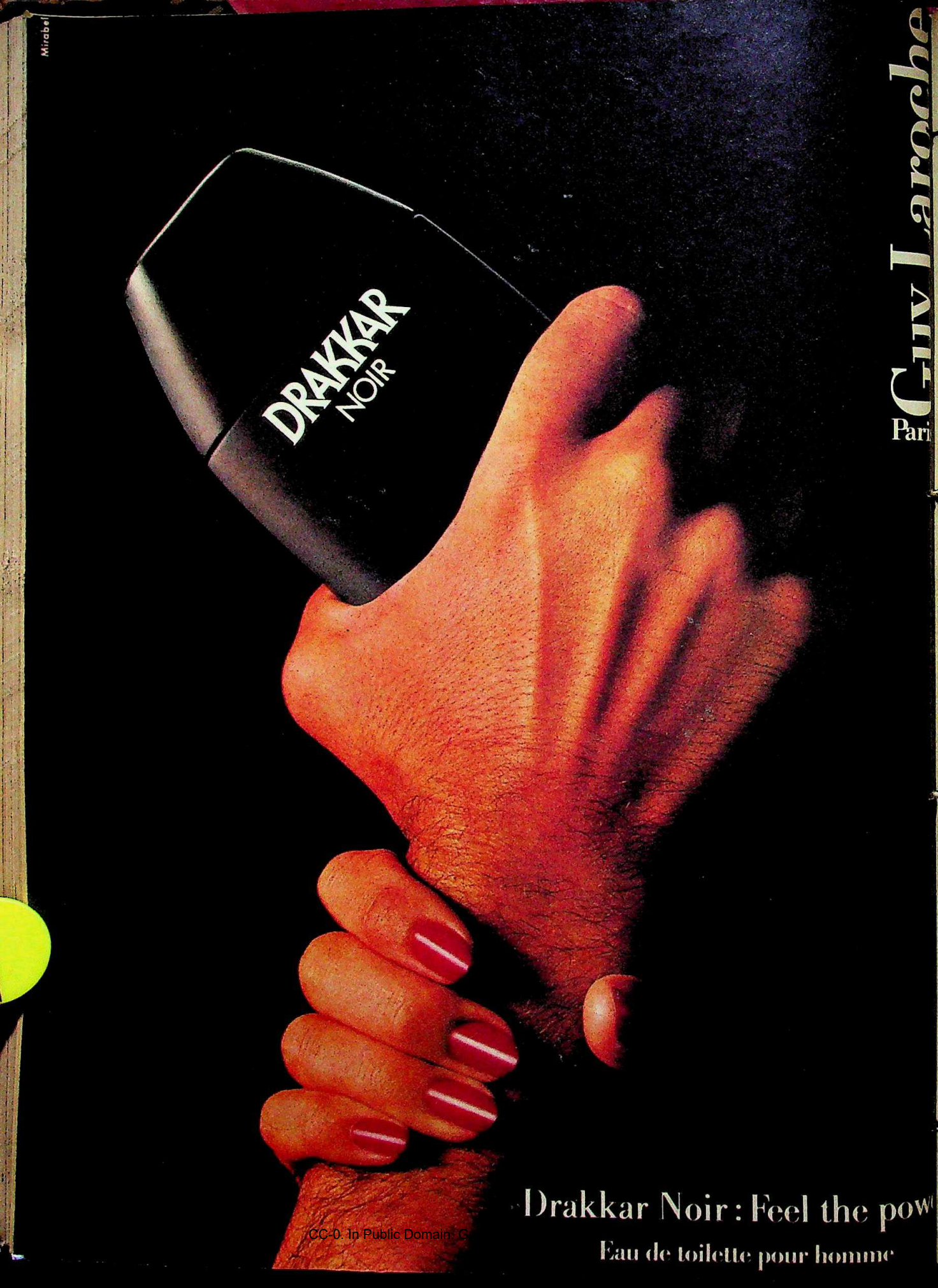

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THE SIKHS

Wedding Banns

Sikhs in Calcutta face a controversial directive

CALCUTTA'S Sikhs are caught in a quandry. The reason: the Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar, has despatched letters to all Sikh institutions, associations and gurdwaras in the state informing them of a resolution adopted by the Singh Sabha on March 13 this year. The resolution bans Sikhs from organising marriages at any place other than a gurdwara. Those who violate the directive face social boycott.

The directive has become the hottest subject of debate amongst the two-lakh-strong Sikh population in the state, over 30,000 of whom reside in Calcutta and its suburbs. It has drawn extreme reactions. While one section of the Sikh populace ridiculed the *hukumnama* by asking if "the Singh Sabha had become Bengal's Akal Takht", another section welcomed the directive.

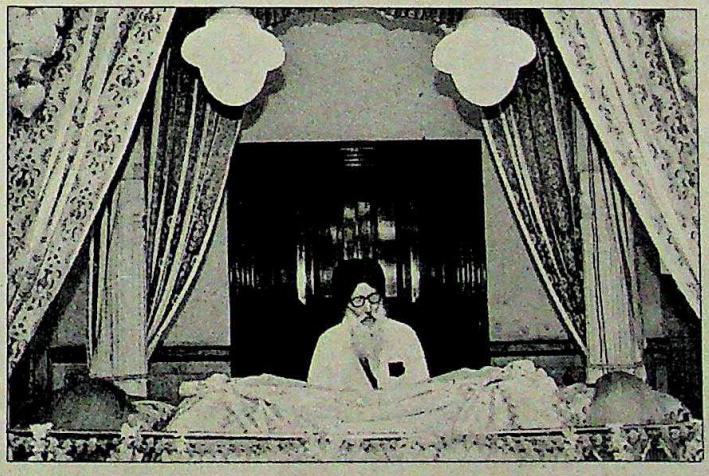
The directive only became known when Sikhs approached granthis and raagis to solemnise their children's marriages and were informed of the new edict. They were also told that "Guru Granth Sahib could not be taken out of the gurdwaras".

Supporters of the directive say that whenever the holy Granth Sahib has been taken to hotels, marriage halls or private residences, it has been subjected to insults. "How can you take the holy book to a hall whose air is filled with tobacco smoke or has a liquor bar in a corner?" asks Saran Singh, former chief secretary of Bihar. A known theologist, Saran Singh, however, admits that nowhere in the Sikh scriptures has it been stated that marriages have to be performed in the gurdwaras. Indeed, the scriptures state that any place where the Guru Granth Sahib is solemnly installed, becomes hallowed.

However, many Sikhs oppose the move. "Dictating social behaviour to an individual tantamounts to denial of individual liberty. This cannot be acceptable," protests H. Singh, president of the All India Punjab Thinkers Forum. Adds Devinder Singh: "We have already suffered a lot from gurdwara politics and will not bow to any dictates of the fundamentalists."

Still, no one has dared to violate the directive as yet. Grand ceremonies have been cancelled at the last minute and simple rites performed in gurdwaras.

The resolution of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha banning Sikhs in Calcutta from organising marriages anywhere except in a gurdwara has succeeded in stirring a hornet's nest



Head granthi Bhai Dalip Singh: ready acceptance

One such case was that of Bhupinder Singh Sarna, an industrialist and owner of a Gurumukhi morninger. Sarna had reportedly made arrangements in a posh local hotel for the marriage of his daughter but was prevailed upon by the Singh Sabha members to organise it in a gurdwara. Says Sarna: "I do not regret it. I was initially hesitant because of opposition from relatives but even they supported me after seeing the superb arrangements in the gurdwara. Everyone must accept this." But Sarna had to organise parties later which involved huge expense. "Doesn't this defeat the very purpose of curbing ostentatious display?" ask critics of the directive.

Interestingly many of the signatories of the resolution themselves suspect the success and acceptability of the directive. Says one of them: "Singh Sabha members are required not to consume liquor after being baptised, but most of them drink. Besides, this directive would not be followed. If I face problems, I would rather go to Punjab and get my children married."

Most of the critics feel that the real reason for the directive is that fewer people are visiting the gurdwaras as a result of which donations are meagre. It is also alleged that the Sabha members have threatened to throw the granthis and raagis out of the gurdwaras if they violated the directive. Counters Bhai Dalip Singh, head granthi: "We haven't been threatened. We have accepted the directive because we think it is right. The people too have accepted this. Proof lies in the fact that all Sundays till January have been booked for marriages."

Despite all the criticism, Mohan Singh Sabharwal, secretary of the Singh Sabha, terms the directive as a "social and reformist move" asserting that "it has nothing to do with either politics or fundamentalism". Not many are willing to speak against the directive openly, but even people like Saran Singh realise the futility of issuing the directive. Hardyal Singh, a senior government executive, refuses to accept the directive. He asks: "Why don't the Singh Sabha members first check the growing trend of becoming clean-shaven amongst young Sikhs?" This is certainly not a reformist move, the critics say, adding that the fundamentalists were behaving like the Bohras.

It is too early to judge whether the directive will meet with success. But at the moment, the city's Sikhs, who were considered liberal, seem to have been forced into taking a step back into orthodoxy.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

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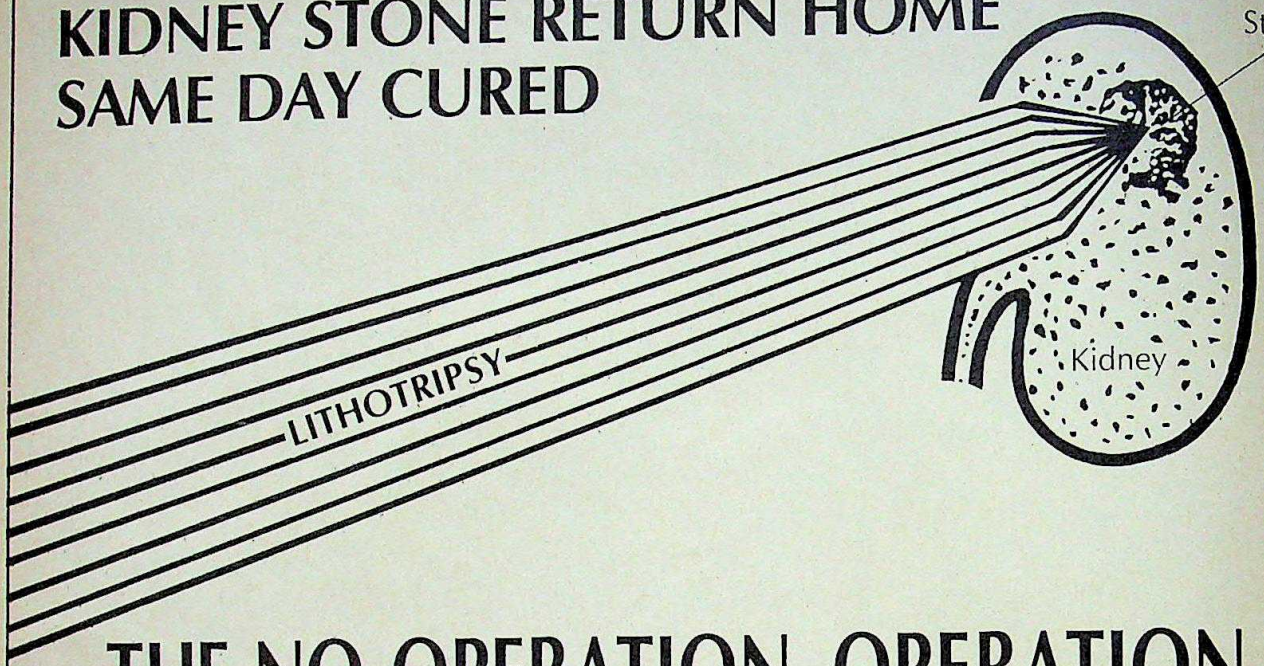

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VIRASAT

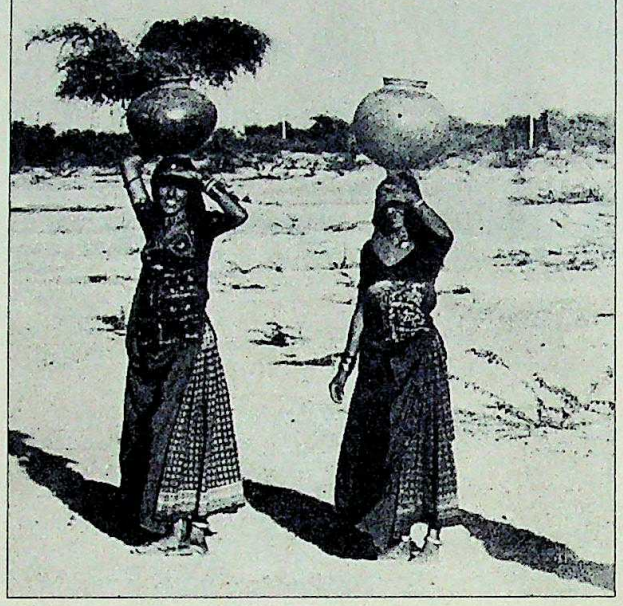
Message of Urgency

CHERRAPUNJI is the wettest place on earth. Supposedly. But in winter, the wettest place in the world has no water at all. The abode of clouds is drought-stricken. The lush forests of Cherrapunji have been stripped away and people watch desperately as all their rain water runs straight off the mountains. In *Virasat*, a moving series on the environment that went on the air last fortnight, 13 different film makers have come together to take a look at the good earth—and if there is any way to save it.

Three years ago, INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) decided to do this series on the environment. But there were no sponsors, despite Doordarshan's offer of 9.00 p.m. prime time. "We knocked on the door of every ad agency in the country, but the message came through loud and clear," says Aruna Vasudev, series producer. "They were not interested in the environment, only in entertainment." Finally, with a few nudges from the Prime Minister's Office, Doordarshan decided to put up the money itself.

The result is *Virasat*, a series of stories that begin "Once upon a time" and, predictably, end "unhappily ever after". While the films themselves are not remarkable, taken together they make a considerable statement: India is turning into a desert and, by the turn of the century, it may have no forests, no greenery and no water left.

Under The Green Canopy—which begins the series—is a sad but beautiful film. In elegiac stanzas, director Kaushik Gupta mourns the dying rain forests of the Andamans. He has a wonderful ear and a passionate feeling for nature, but that cannot sweeten the bitter pill: from a land of rich forests, the Andamans is turning into a desert, a desert surrounded by an ocean.



A long trek for water

Far away, in *The Naked Hills* of Garhwal, an old couple, hungry, have been waiting for their daughter-in-law to return from her father's house, where she has gone to beg for firewood. The mountains are becoming poorer and the journey longer. Women often have to take a bus to go deep into the hills, looking for firewood. There is nothing left in Garhwal now except its young, hardy men and women, most of whom have left their beautiful mountains to become domestic servants in distant cities.

In Gujarat, it hasn't rained for three years. Last June, Kantilal Rathod trekked through caked after caked village for 2,000 miles when the drought was at its bitter height to make *Waterless in Gujarat*. He has come back with some very stark images: villagers dig water holes and then sit guard over them all night, they fight like dogs over the few drops of water that lie at the bottom of parched wells. Waterless, futureless people living among the carcasses of their animals. "What was so shocking," says Rathod, "was the absence of trees and birds for miles and miles."

Just when you begin to think the situation is hopeless, comes *The Greening of Ralegan Shindi*, a miracle of a film that shows, as Vasudev puts it that, "by God, something can be done". Anna Hazare is a man with a vision and Rs 20,000 retirement gratuity in his pocket, who wants to repay God for saving his life during the war. So he returns to his poor village in Maharashtra—where illicit brewing of liquor is the main occupation—and quietly brings about a miracle.

The Greening of Ralegan Shindi is a film of hope. In nine years, Hazare transforms the village into an area of plenty, through community work and the simple but effective formula: to change the country, start with the village. To change the village, start with the man. There is food and fodder and water for everyone. Nobody drinks liquor or even smokes here now and every schoolchild is taught to plant a tree. In the midst of drought, Ralegan Shindi is green.

The films, however, lack action. Like interminable geography

Still from the tele-serial: moving series

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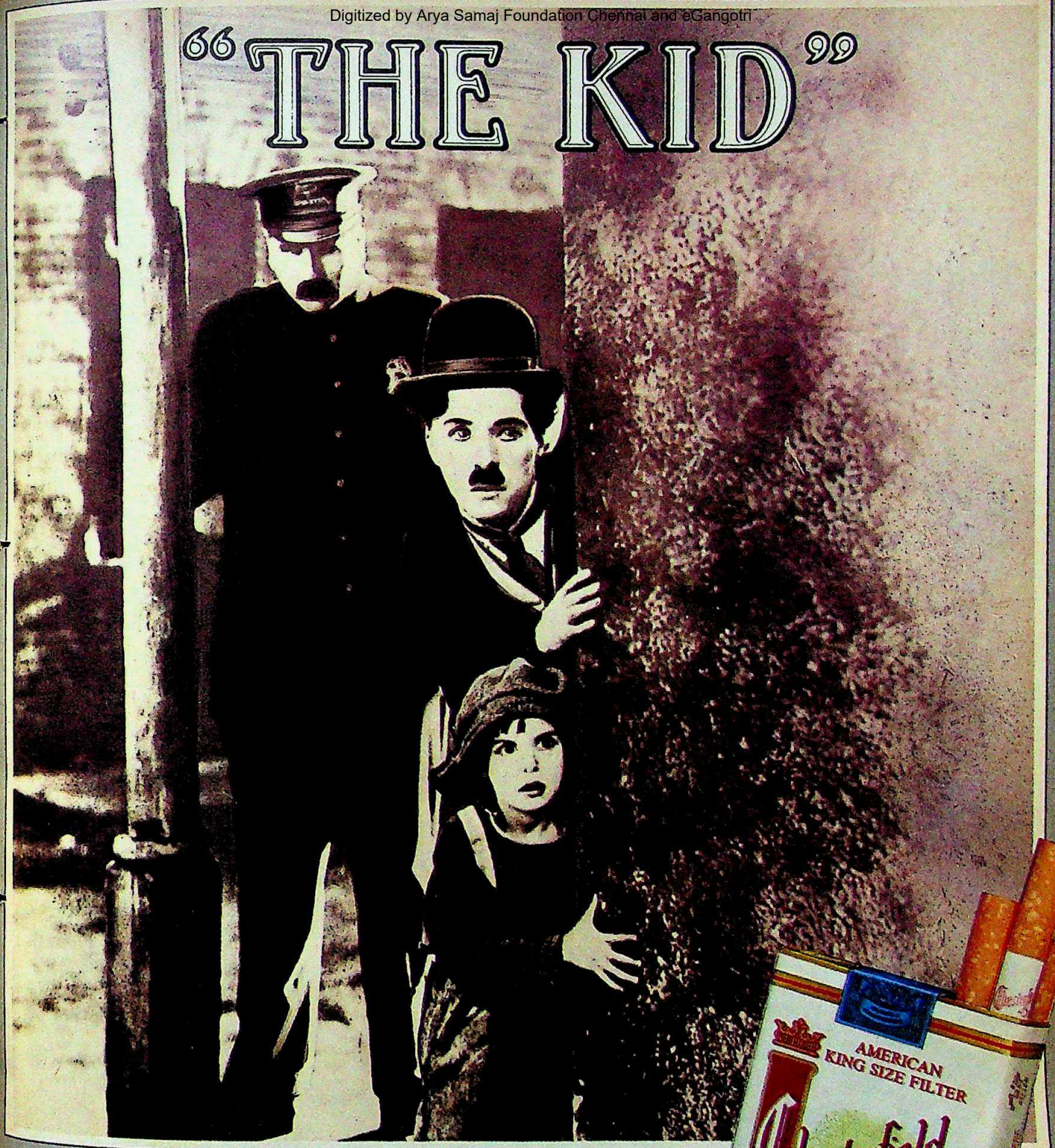
"THE KID"



In The Great American Tradition

"The Kid" was the first feature film Chaplin wrote and directed himself. Billed as "6 reels of joy", it took its perfectionist maker a whole year to produce and featured him as the "little tramp" who had already captured the hearts of movie-goers the world over. The tramp's timeless appeal was demonstrated as recently as 1970 when a Creative Arts Award citation described him as "the most famous, complex and vulnerably human character in the history of cinema".

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The Super

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...ee po-
...ng a gun-tot-
...life imitating art,
...would say. Or was it
...he other way round?
—PANKAJ PACHAURI

...ridwar

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lessons, the shots sometime go on for so long you could finish *War and Peace* in the time it takes the film to move. The environment, unfortunately, is a subject that does not speak. It is just lying there, dead and dying. A sameness runs through the episodes and most of the films tend to stumble among cliches: lush forests, cracked earth, peasant women clinging to their babies, sweat glistening on the backs of labourers. And to top it all, there is a neat little moral bow on the package: nature is dying and we've got to save it.

Made in one month each, with a budget of Rs 2.25 lakh, there is little pathos and drama in most of the films. The cameraman needs to linger a little longer, to listen to more voices, to catch the moment. It is ultimately people that make a documentary sparkle. *End of the Trail* is one film that does somewhat, as it follows the travails of one shepherd family up the beautiful Kumaon Hills. But life is becoming tough for them and there are few grazing lands left. At the end, 12-year-old Dagar may give up his family's ancient tradition of sheep rearing and open a tea-shop instead.

All this is very well but, ultimately, who cares? There is an urgency in INTACH's message at the end of each film: "Get involved. There isn't much time left." Somehow the man in the city, cocooned in his urbane, manicured life, has to be touched—and that is the toughest part. "If I can only make him realise," says Chidananda Dasgupta, co-producer of the series, "that one day when he opens his tap, no water will come out, then he'll care." That is *Virasat*'s hope. —SIMRAN BHARGAVA

TAFTEESH

A Police Plot

THIS was a different kind of 'shooting' for the Delhi Police. No, it wasn't a counter-terrorist attack or a target practice session. Still, the roster of policemen taking part in the operation was impressive—three IPS officers, two assistant police commissioners, five inspectors, three sub-inspectors and a platoon of lower-rung men of khaki. All were busy with the 29 shooting stints for an hour-long telefilm slated for Doordarshan's Saturday night viewing.

The final report of this venture into the mean streets of film making is, well, a cops-and-robbers story, *Tafteesh* (investigation). Visualised, scripted and directed by Deputy Commissioner of Police for Traffic, S.B. Deol, the film's entire cast is from the force. It was financed by special police officers—citizens who help the Delhi Police.

The story line is a straight lift from a 1972 police file. A spate of milk booth robberies in the capital shocks policedom. A deputy inspector general of police shouts at his superintendent (played by Deol), who in turn shouts at the inspectors and the investigating staff. The shaking saucer and cup in the hands of a shivering orderly sets the music.

The scene of the crime is chaotic as usual. Eyewitnesses are either too scared or too hysteric. In the backdrop is a vindictive local politician lambasting the clueless police for their inefficiency and adding to their haplessness. After being derailed by false eyewitness accounts of a bystander (played immaculately by Kanwaljeet, Deol's IPS wife), the probe gets off with the involuntary help of reformed criminals—whose conversations are taped clandestinely to get clues.

After days of surveillance—and the humorous ragging of a newly-recruited sub-inspector (IPS officer Deepak Mishra) by a head-constable—the chase ends with one arrest. But the probe is grounded when the criminal (famous police wrestler Naresh Kumar) turns out to be deaf and dumb. Mishra wants to try third degree treatment ("I'll 'train' him in a minute"). But he's stopped by seniors who prefer what they call 'scientific interrogation'. Finally, the case is solved and the officers put on a new trail without even a nod of admiration from seniors.

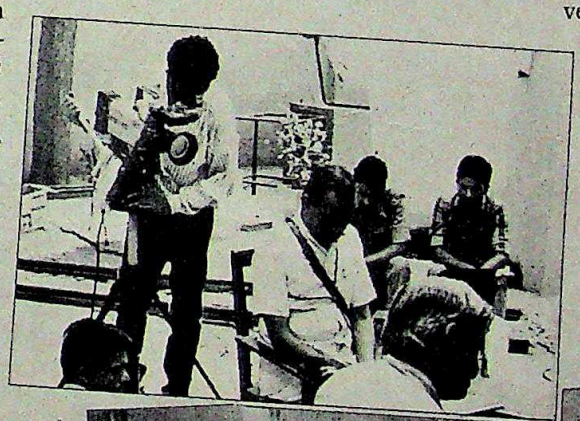
Barring a few, all characters in the film play the roles they have in real life, and that has helped them imitate accurately the mannerisms of policemen and criminals. "I asked them to just remain what they are. That took care of acting," says Deol. The result is apparent in the use of lock-up language—petty criminals greet officials with a *Jai Hind Janaab*.

One thing the film certainly achieves is humanisation of the force. Policemen who're either supermen, supercrooks or superclowns on the screen are shown as flesh-and-blood characters (one even trembles after a bout with an armed criminal). The criminals too come out as weak characters, as when the surrounded leader of the robbers' gang drops his gun helplessly. No heroics, no melodrama.

The making of the film had so much likeness to real life that almost all the cast improvised their dialogues. When Doordarshan asked for the script, writers Deol and sub-inspector Arun Kumar had to see the film again to copy it. And once during shooting in a Delhi suburb, a motorist complained at a police station that he'd seen three policemen chasing a gun-toting man. Life imitating art, one would say. Or was it the other way round?

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

Shooting in progress; and (below) scene from the film: realistic portrayal



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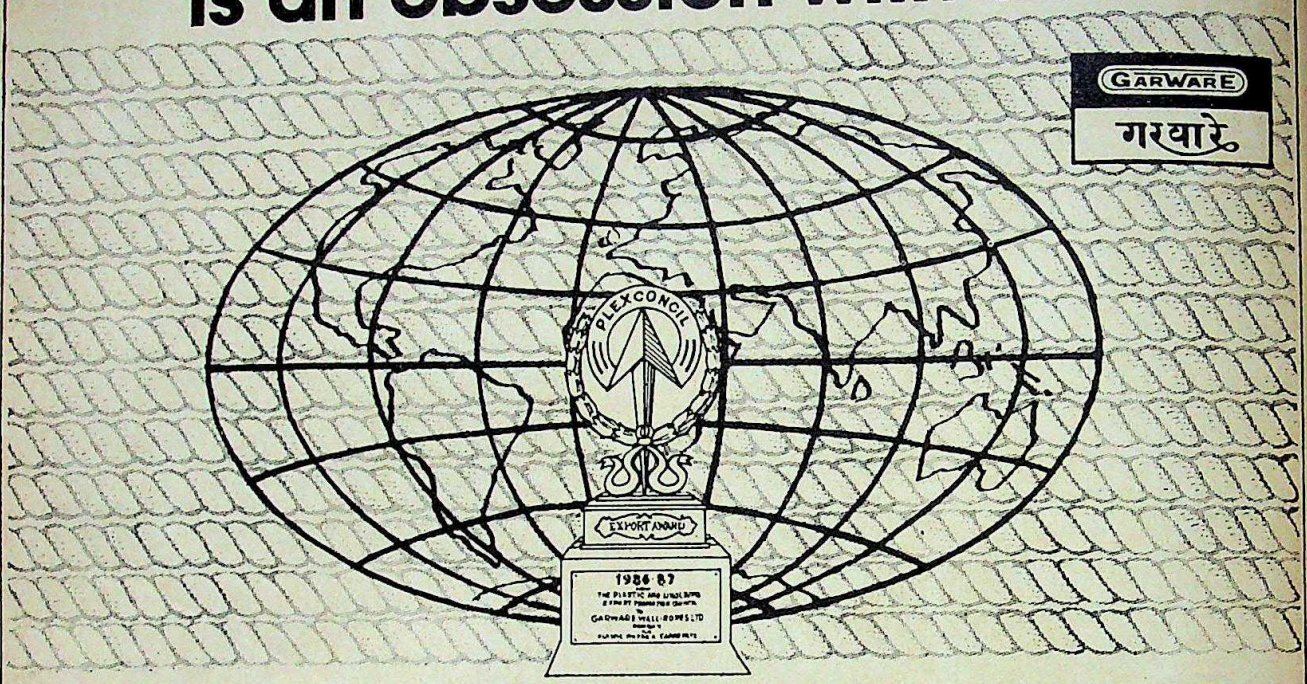

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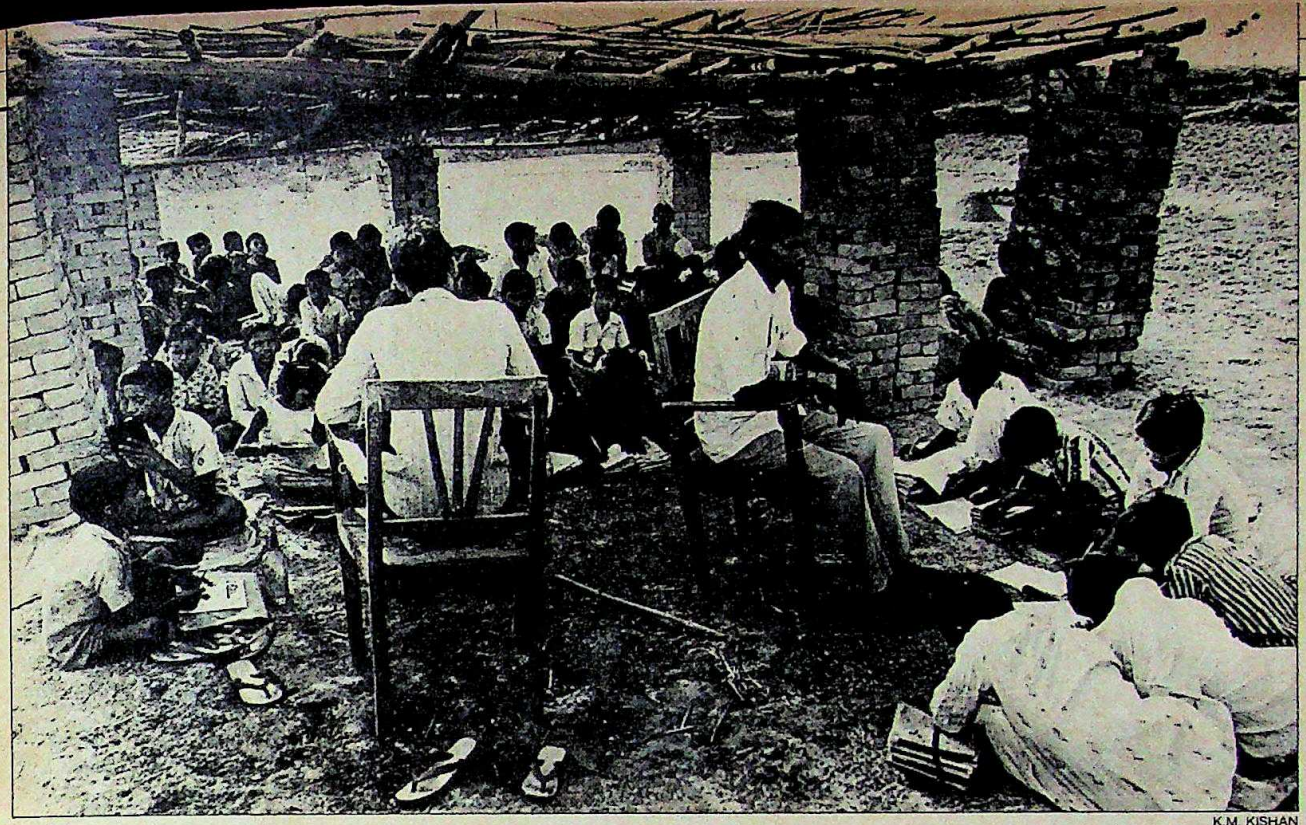

K.M. KISHAN

A school in Bihar: shocking state

OPERATION BLACKBOARD

An Empty Slate

The ambitious programme fails to take off

PLACE: the Ballabhgarh (Haryana) check-post on the Delhi-Bombay highway, 40 km off the capital. Time: sunset. A frail, bespectacled man moves between trucks and lorries, pleading with the burly drivers for donations of 50 paise and one rupee. Headmaster Sant Singh Lamba is raising funds to lay the foundation of his primary school. So far, he has bought 500 bricks.

That neatly sums up the progress of the Central Government's multi-crore Operation Blackboard—a scheme called the foundation-stone of the country's educational system. Lamba's begging bowl method illustrates that the funds meant for his government-run school—part of the first phase of the Operation—have got entangled in red tape.

Two years ago, when Rajiv Gandhi's Government launched the New Education Policy, it was criticized for having an elitist bias. In response, the Government flaunted Operation Blackboard. In November 1986, its action programme said: "The purpose of the Operation is to ensure minimum essential facilities in primary schools... within a time-frame."

Last fortnight, when the Central Advisory Board on Education met in New Delhi, the Government patted itself on the back for successfully completing the first phase of the scheme, covering 20 per cent of primary schools in the country. Nothing could be more untrue.

The Operation had envisaged minimum requirements for primary schools: at least two teachers, two 30 sq mt rooms, one 9 ft deep verandah, toilets, and aids like chalk and blackboards. The project was to be completed in three phases: 20 per cent of schools in 1987-88, 30 per cent in 1988-89, and the rest in the next year.

As 44 per cent of schools in the country don't have *pucca* buildings, the scheme would have cost a whopping Rs 1,200 crore—half of the seventh plan outlay for education available with the Centre. When planners set out to identify the needs of 20 per cent of schools in Bihar, they discovered that of the 13,271 schools surveyed, the buildings of 10,214 did not meet the Operation's specifications. Equally shocking, 3,113 schools had only one teacher, 10,771 did not have blackboards. Only seven had chalk and dusters. Bihar alone needed Rs 72 crore in the first year of the project and Rs 400 crore to complete it.

Six months after the first phase of the scheme should have been completed, only the paperwork is through. The result: many schools exist only on paper.

Developing cold feet, the Centre chalked out a novel scheme to put the burden of constructing buildings on the states, funds for which would come from the National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme. This was initially resisted by the states and the Left-ruled West Bengal even decided to boycott the scheme. Says its Education Minister Kanti Biswas: "Our objection was that we have to spend Rs 60 crore to get a Central grant of Rs 15 crore." But when the Congress(I)-ruled states fell in line, West Bengal followed suit as it did not want to lose Central aid.

Despite the Centre-state dispute on the issue being sorted out, so far only the paperwork for the scheme has been completed. More than Rs 110 crore has been spent, but only on files. Result: many schools exist only on paper even six months after the first phase of the

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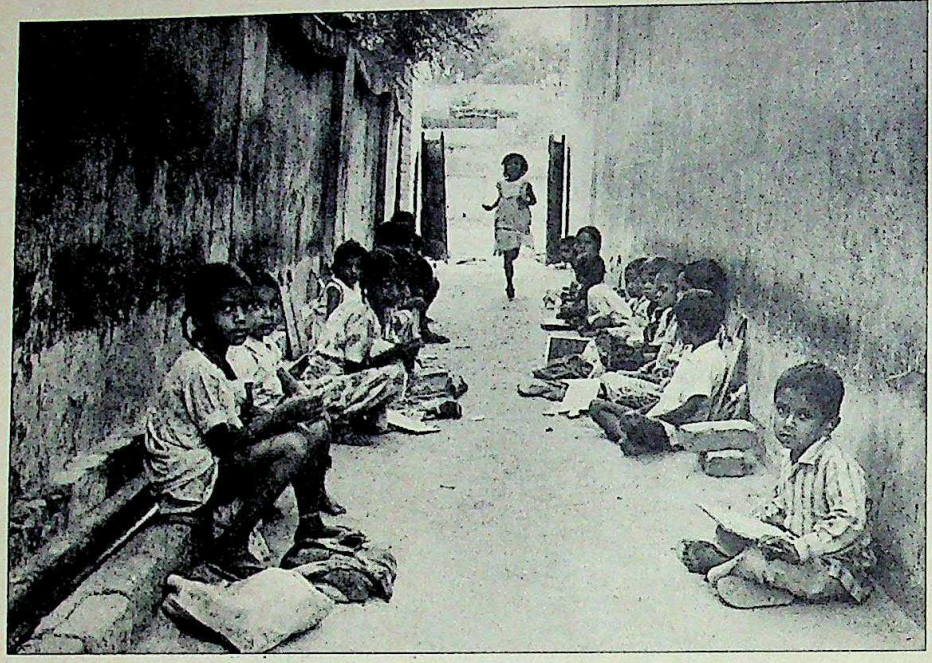
JAGANNATH NEGI



A primary school in Ballabhgarh

scheme should have been completed.

In the government primary school in Bans Mohallah hamlet of district Palwal, Haryana, three teachers take classes under a tree and use the boundary walls for blackboards. They carry registers home and deposit their chairs with an obliging neighbour. The 120 students have to bring gunny bags if they don't want to sit on the ground. Extreme heat, cold and a drizzle mean a holiday. Says the principal, Gyanvati: "We used to take classes in the gram sabha room earlier, but the roof collapsed three years ago." Neither she nor the hapless Lamba—who scours the highway for donations—has heard of the Government's grand plans for their schools.

BOTH their schools should have been covered in the first phase of the Operation. But in the state capital, Chandigarh, the Director of School Education, Sajjan Singh, insists: "We have finished the construction of buildings in 20 per cent of the blocks and sent the education material to most of them." Clearly, the Haryana Government has sent its progress reports to the Centre only to get more aid, while the scheme is yet to reach the classrooms.

In Uttar Pradesh—where Chief Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari announced in the Assembly that every primary school will have a building by 1990—things are no different. Though Chaumuhan block in Mathura district was selected for the first phase of the Operation, no work has taken place. None of the 65 school buildings in Chaumuhan meets the planned specifications. Says the Basic Education Officer, Iqbal Ahmed, in Mathura: "The Government should first provide boundary walls. The schools can then plant trees to hold classes under them. I can't see how the Government can give two rooms to every school."

As the state spends only Rs 72 per capita on education, Ahmed is just being realistic. The difference between the planners' perceptions and the actual reality was starkly illustrated when the first batch of educational equipment was sent to Chaumuhan. First, a hunt began to find a godown for the goods. The lone room of a primary school—which housed the office of the block's sub-deputy inspector of schools—was cleared to accommodate the goods. But during a shower, the roof started leaking and the equipment was damaged. Obviously, in its haste to flaunt results, the Government had put the cart before the horse. As Biswas points out: "It's absurd to talk about science kits and games when children do not have even a roof over their heads."

If the scheme had tried just providing the bare minimum, it would have succeeded. But money was wasted on giving educational kits to schools without buildings.

True, in Rajasthan the construction of schools is visible. But here too corners are being cut. In the Alwar municipal area, 43 schools lack a building, only 10 are being given a room each while toilets are being built in 15. In Teej Ki Road, 100 students cram into two rooms measuring 8 ft by 8 ft. Third standard students study hygiene while a slushy ground serves as their playing field. Down the road, in Mehandi Bagh, 175 students are accommodated in one room.

The standardised education kits proposed under the Operation have also become a farce. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) devised these kits in collaboration with the Indian Bureau of Standards. A 78-page document of norms and specifications, painstakingly defines the needs of the schools which include—besides jigsaw puzzles, building blocks and more than 200 illustrated books—elementary science aids and chemicals.

Sadly, these kits rarely reach rural children. In Chaumuhan for instance, all that the local administration received were crude maps and charts, 10 jute mats for each school and a table and chair, though the goods were supposed to have cost Rs 7,215 per school.

Equally useless has been the NCERT's programme to reorient teachers. In the last three years, more than 15 lakh teachers have been trained in more scientific methods of teaching. But due to the lack of supporting equipment, they cannot use their newly acquired skills. Laments NCERT Director, P.L. Malhotra: "It's a waste of money and effort to train the teachers. By the time our schools get these educational aids, they would have forgotten the new techniques."

Trying to apply new techniques was being over-ambitious. If Operation Blackboard had provided the bare minimum, it would have succeeded. Unfortunately, it remains just another catchword in the planners' dictionary, which they are unable to translate into reality.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI with FARZAND AHMED

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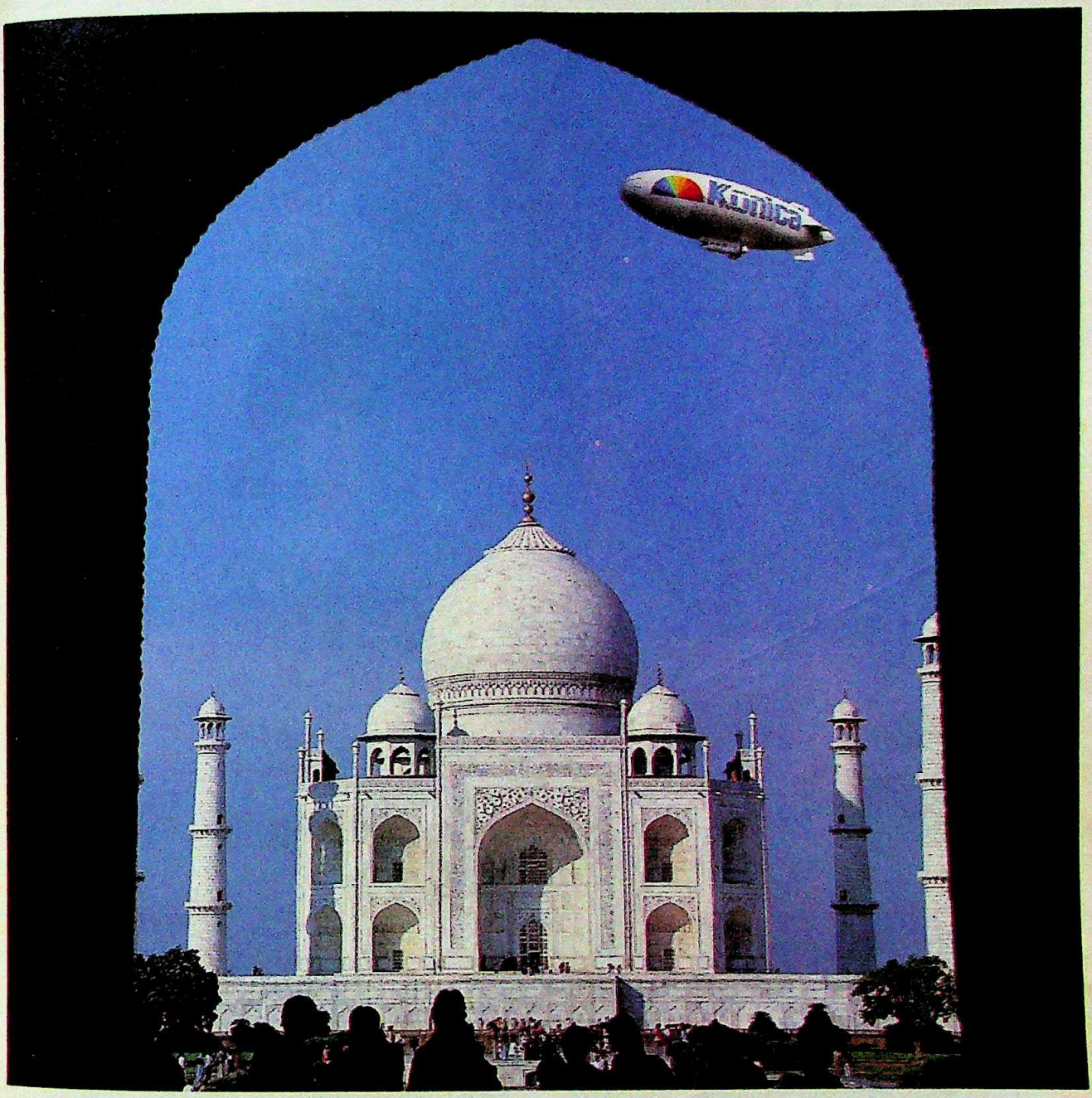

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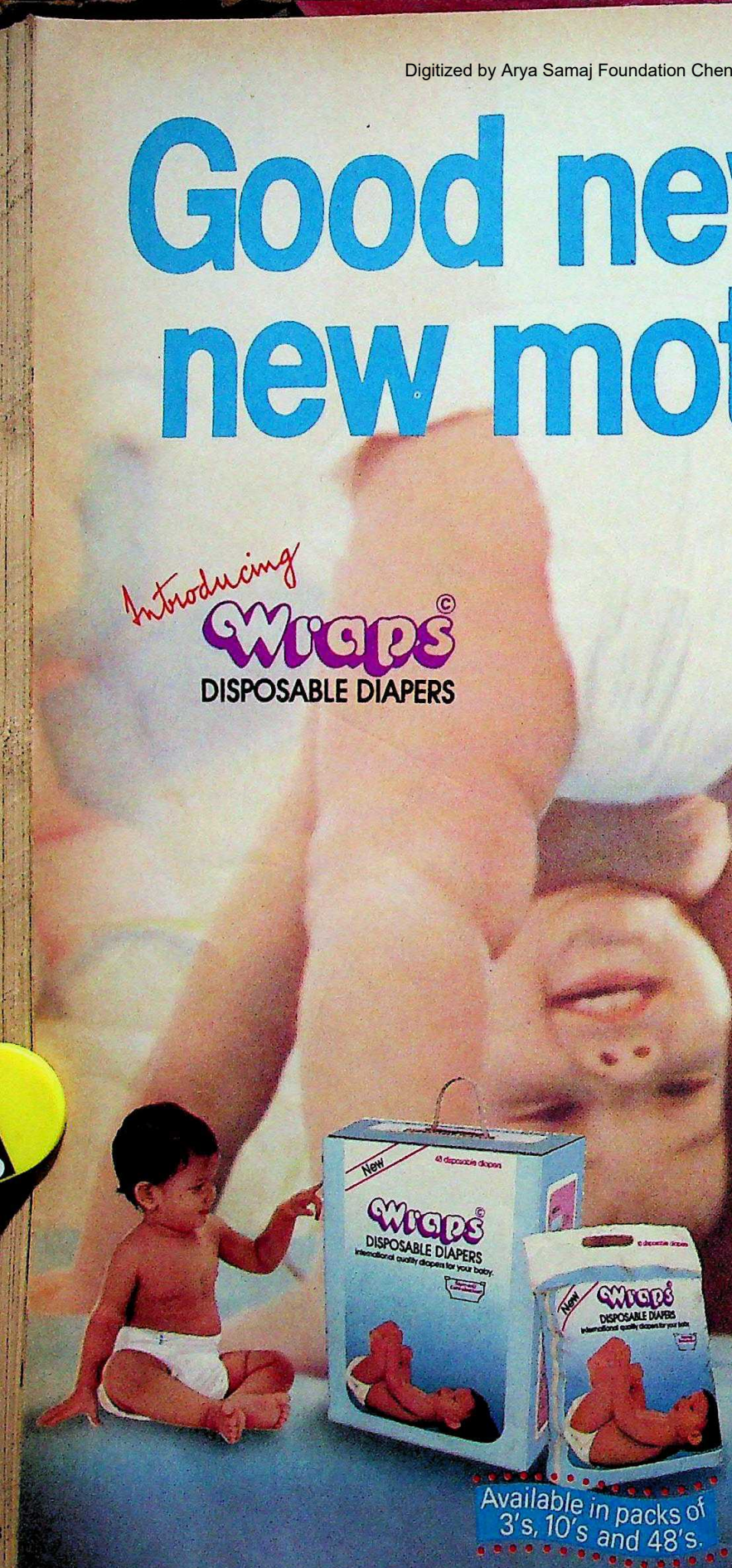

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Parsi Parade

Amusing tales of Bombay life

TALES FROM FIROZSHA BAAG
by ROHINTON MISTRY
Penguin, Canada
Price: £3.95; Pages: 250

ROHINTON Mistry quotes a statement by Thoreau which serves as an epigraph to this collection of 11 tales: "Not that the story need be long, but it will take a long while to make it short."

This may be a clue to Mistry's formal motivations, but it cannot guarantee the value of his fictional content. That is dependent on the reader's response to the Bombay Parsi life portrayed: is it reasonably accurate and fair, or is it distorted by the memories of a migrant to Canada at age 23?

About the literary talent of Rohinton Mistry there can be no doubt, unless one is prejudiced by his prejudices, so to speak. Would he write as he does if he had only, or primarily, an Indian audience in mind? The first story, *Auspicious Occasion*, won him one of his two prizes at Toronto University. It begins, 'With a bellow Rustomji emerged from the WC." And he reports what had happened to his wife Mehroo whom he had married at 36 when she was 16. "*Arre* forget your *gunga-bunga*....That stinking lavatory upstairs is leaking again....There I was squatting—barely started—when some one pulled the flush. Then on my head I felt—*pchuk*—all wet: On my head."

A little later, after a cup of tea, Rustomji "decided to wait awhile before his bath, to give his obdurate bowels one more chance." But after 10 minutes with *The Times of India*, he gives up and prepares for his bath: "He arched his back till his bottom stuck out, then raised one foot slightly and tensed. Nothing happened. Not even a little fart."

Amusing, of course, realistic, perhaps. And the story ends, on this Auspicious Occasion of Behramroje, with Mehroo informing her husband that Dastoor Dhunjisha of their fire temple had been murdered by a *chasniwalla* employed by him, who threw the corpse into the sacred fire-temple well.

If you enjoy this story, because of such events, or in spite of them, you will enjoy the rest as well. The author's parents certainly did, it appears, from the last story, *Swimming Lessons*, in which they receive and read his book (i.e. *Tales from Firozsha Baag* without that last story). Their only objection to it is that there is nothing positive about Parsis, creating the impression "that the whole community was full of cranky, bigoted people". Even the one set in Toronto, about a Parsi migrant who cannot learn how to use a western-type toilet, the author's father finds "funny at times", though also "shameful and disgusting". The only question that troubles him about it is: "What is the point of such a fantasy," and, no doubt, the author dismisses it as naivety.

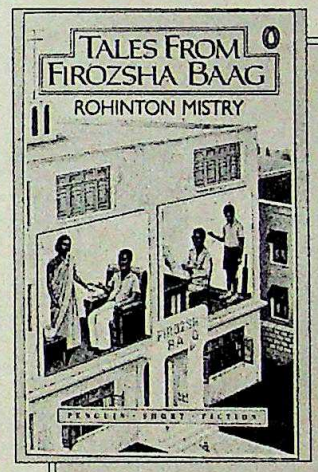
If we put aside these issues, we have to admit all the claims made by the publishers for Rohinton Mistry's Tales. He does impress us with "his witty prose and touchingly real characters", and we do become "as familiar with the people of Firozsha Baag as we are with our own neighbours." (Assuming we are familiar with our neighbours, which most of us are not. We have to wait till we read about them in fiction by a brilliantly observant author.) Mistry's critical perceptions are always woven skilfully into the texture of each narrative. In addition, every story has references to one or more characters and events in a different story, which suitably emphasises time, place and setting. Firozsha Baag, Bombay and India in the post-Independence era are made convincing by hundreds of relevant details, even if one finds fault, in terms of accuracy, with a few of them.

In one story, *The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*, the narrator is a Goan ayah. She knows that "no ayah gets key to a flat", and that "life as ayah means living close to floor." Her name is Jacqueline. "But they always say Jaakaylee. Or worse, Jaakayl." Her obsession with ghosts dominates her life, but it is her plight as a domestic servant that gradually becomes its real theme. Her employers are affluent, "but a *masala* machine they will not buy. Jaakaylee must keep on doing it till her arms fall out from her shoulders."

The story which tells us most about the author as migrant is *Lend Me Your Light* in which he is the narrator. His brother Percy commits himself to social work in a village, returning to it even after his companion Navjeet is killed in a conspiracy against them by the village landlords. Percy's friend Jamshed, who had migrated to America, and is on a visit to Bombay, as is the author, is confirmed in his view that migration is the only answer to their problems. When Mistry returns to Toronto, he is not so sure: "Gradually, I discovered I'd brought back with me my entire burden of riddles and puzzles, unsolved. The sorry package was there, not lightened at all. The epiphany would have to wait for another time, another trip."

For that epiphany we may have to wait for his next work of fiction.

—NISSIM EZEKIEL



EXTRACT

Behroze was alone when Jehangir arrived on Saturday evening. Her parents were out, so was the servant.

"You missed choir practice on Thursday," she said accusingly, crossing her legs. Her skirt slipped above the knee, exposing part of her thigh, and she didn't pull it down.

Jehangir sensed nervously that somewhere in this was a challenge to him. The trace of hostility in the air narrowed the distance between them and made the room more intimate. Outside in the compound a game of volley-ball was in progress, and the dull thud as the ball met flesh and bone could be heard inside the flat.

"I am sorry. I had something very important to do. It concerns us. I would like to talk to you about it." The note of formality in his short, complete sentences sounded reassuringly in his ears. "This is the first time you've been alone at home," he ventured with an echo of her accusing tone.

"You didn't come since last weekend. Maybe my parents think we've broken up, and they didn't need to stick around to guard my virginity."

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Out from the Shadows

A scholarly assessment of Azad and his leadership

ABUL KALAM AZAD:
An Intellectual and Religious Biography
by IAN HENDERSON DOUGLAS
and GAIL MINAULT
Oxford University Press
Price: Rs 190.00; Pages: 375

WHILE there's been much brouhaha over Jawaharlal Nehru's birth centenary celebrations, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's centenary this year has attracted little attention—apart from the controversy over the release of the unpublished 30 pages of his autobiography *India Wins Freedom*. A staunch opponent of Partition, Azad never entirely forgave other Congress leaders for acceding to it. The withheld pages could thus contain critical references to some of them—an acute embarrassment for the Government during its celebration of 40 years of freedom.

Therein lies the rub. Given our preoccupation with Gandhi and Nehru, the role of most other leaders—and their differences with Gandhi and Nehru—has been marginalised. Hence, it isn't without significance that the first scholarly study on Azad has appeared long after his death, and been written not in India but at Oxford. Work on *Abul Kalam Azad: An intellectual and religious biography* was begun by Ian Henderson Douglas who did not live to see its publication. His study, however, was revised and updated by Christian Troll and Gail Minault, two leading specialists on South Asia.

Given the trends in our historical writing—where there is a tendency to develop cults—a biography of a leader who "lacks" the charisma and stature of Gandhi or Nehru isn't a popular subject. Douglas has filled this gap by exploring the autonomy of what is arbitrarily regarded as the second-rank leadership in our freedom struggle.

Azad's role is particularly difficult to assess. He wasn't the most dramatic of persons like Mohamed Ali, the hero of the Khilafat days in the early '20s. Although a Muslim, Azad wasn't an important leader even then. Later too, during the Round Table Conferences and the acrimonious debates over the Communal Award, there aren't many references to his participation. Even in the crucial negotiations preceding the transfer of power, the Maulana wielded no great influence. His presence was, at best, a vindication of the Congress claim that it also represented Muslims.

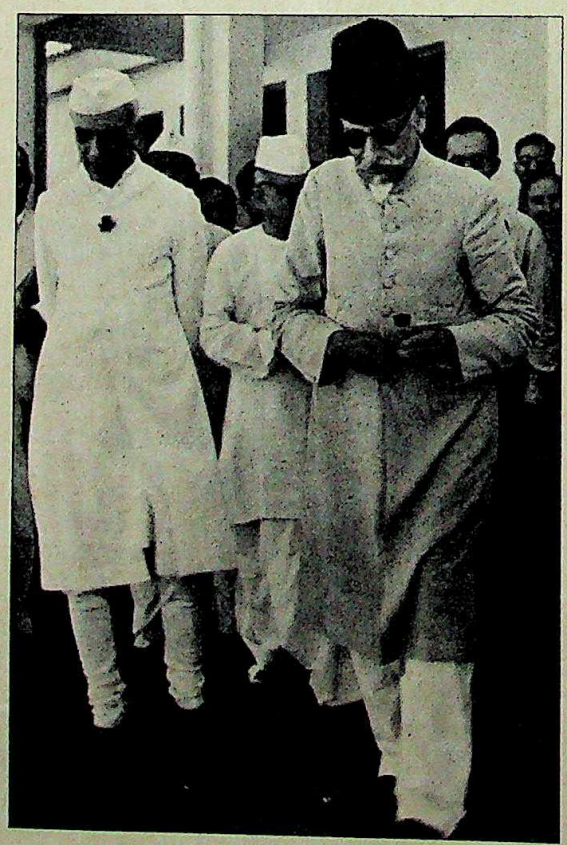
So, Azad's greatness lay not so much in being part of the Congress movement, but in adhering to an ideological stand—part of a larger historical process of which the Congress was just an important component. A staunch nationalist, he'd once said: "I am proud of being an Indian," adding: "I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality."

Douglas argues that "neither in his (Azad's) political life nor in his religious thought were there major discontinuities or changes in direction". Even the trauma of the Khilafat Movement's collapse did not affect the essential continuity of Azad's political ideology. All along, he adhered to the principle of Indian nationalism and was a consistent champion of communal peace and amity.

The only difference was in his framework of analysis. The Maulana's earlier perspective was mainly influenced by the Quran and Islamic traditions. But in the post-Khilafat era Azad was drawn to secular nationalism. Thus, his criticism of Jinnah and the two-nation theory wasn't couched in theological terms, as was the case with the Deoband *ulama*, but was based on the principles of a composite and secular polity. "It is one of the greatest frauds on the people to suggest," he wrote in his autobiography, "that religious affinity can unite areas which are geographically, economically, linguistically and culturally different." With an insight rare for those from his background, Azad argued: "The real problems of the country were economic, not communal. The differences related to classes, not to communities."

For these reasons, Azad did not spare his Congress colleagues for their "abject surrender" to the Partition demand. He noted with regret that "within a month of Lord Mountbatten's arrival in India, Jawaharlal, the firm opponent of Partition, had become at least acquiescent towards the idea". What surprised him most was the change in Gandhi's attitude. Having told Azad on March 31, 1947 that "if the Congress wishes to accept Partition, it will be over my dead body", the Mahatma after his April 2 meeting with Mountbatten began to repeat the arguments which Vallabhbhai Patel had already used in support of Partition. "If even you have now adopted these views," a saddened Azad told Gandhi, "I see no hope of saving India from catastrophe." The catastrophe did occur and is best summed up by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, the poet who found himself on the other side of the Indo-Pak border: *"This leprous daybreak, dawn night's fangs have mangled. This is not that long-looked-for break of day."*—MUSHIRUL HASAN

Nehru with Azad: staunch nationalist



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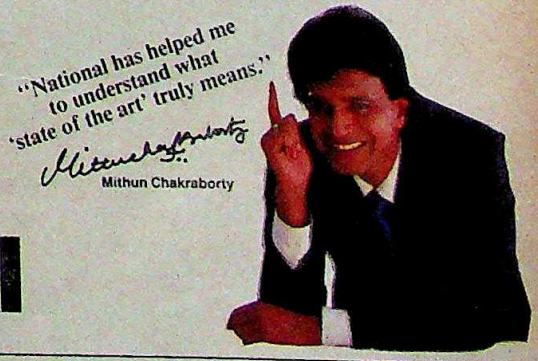

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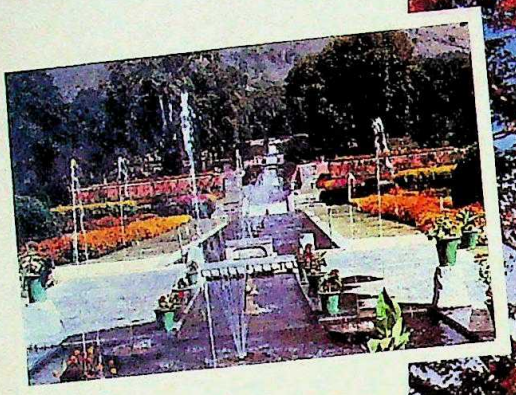

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KHUSHWANT SINGH

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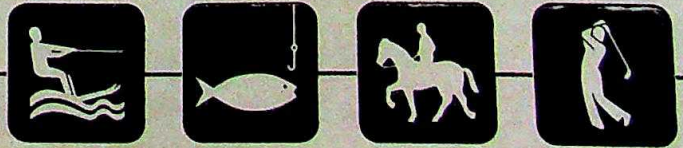

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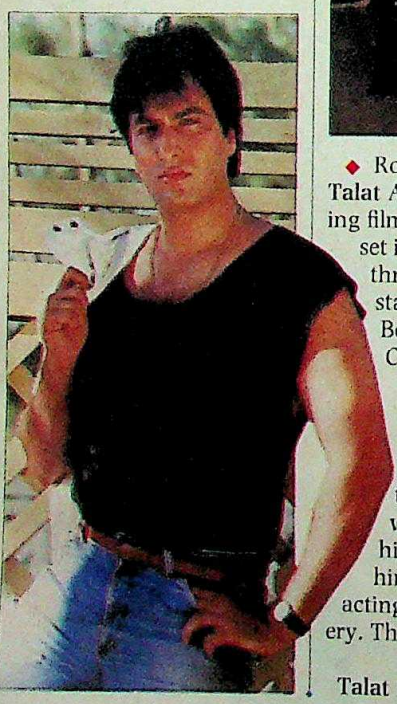
◆ Wonder what makes him tick? Last month, **Sameer Mehra** cracked Rubik's Clock Puzzle—the latest brain teaser from Professor Erno Rubik. India's newest whiz-kid succeeded in setting all 18 clocks on the two surfaces of the puzzle at 12—something even its creator claims he's unable to achieve.

Sameer took a full 90 min-

PRASHANT PANJIAR

Sameer Mehra: whiz-kid

utes the first time he handled the puzzle—an £8 present from his aunt in London. Now he does it in 29 seconds flat—by the clock. And is constantly improving on it. "It's mere child's play," condescends the 11-year-old. Now he's marking time till the Hungarian professor gets back to him.



Talat Aziz: romantic debut

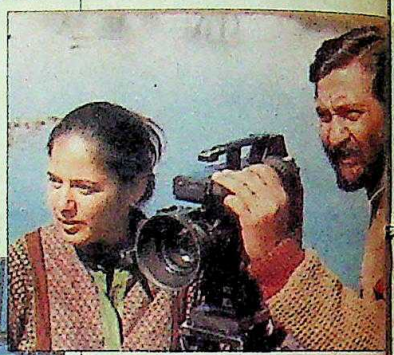
◆ Romance comes easily to **Talat Aziz**. In his debut-making film, *Jannat*—a love story set in the hills—the heart-throb of ghazal fans will star opposite the latest Bombay sensation, Juhi Chawla.

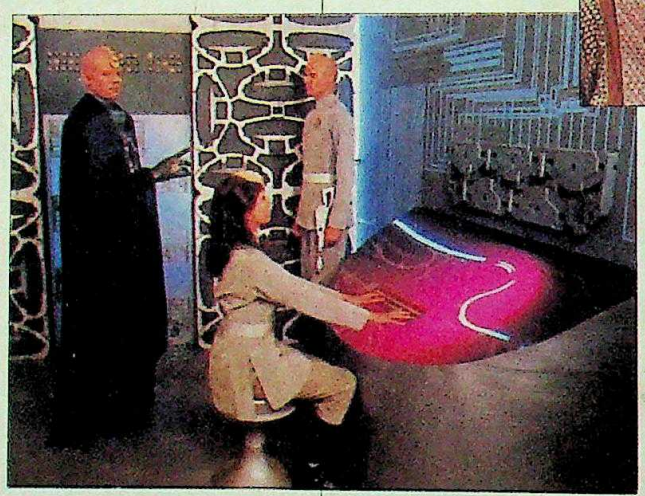
"I have what it takes to become a good actor," says Aziz confidently. But he is not taking chances anyway and has already hired a tutor to teach him the finer points of acting and dialogue delivery. That does not mean he's

Shakira Caine displaying her "fabulous fakes"

◆ She calls them her "fabulous fakes". No, these are not imitations of Rembrandt but a creative collection of Indian costume jewellery designed by **Shakira Caine**, the glamorous Indian-born wife of British actor Michael Caine. Shakira has, in collaboration with Bombay entrepreneur Sunita Pitamber, created stunning contemporary fashions using Indian craft and technique; something she says "an elegant lady could wear with flamboyant flair or quiet chic". To be launched by Harrods this month, Pitamber is counting on the collection "being a golden sell-out".

turning his back on his first love—music. He'll be singing the songs for the film. And in between takes, will sell OCM textiles as part of its latest advertisement campaign.



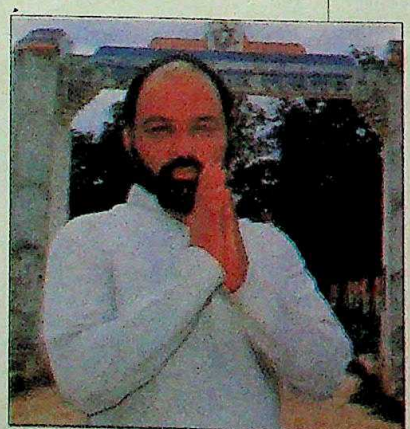


Scene from *Sigma*; (inset) Bizeth and Talwar

◆ It's time for blast-off. So fasten your seat belts. *Sigma*, the *desi* version of space thriller *Star Trek*, is all set to whisk viewers into Galactic Year 305 of the Fusion Era. Directed by **Ashok Talwar** and **Bizeth**, this 26-part serial is slated to go on the air next month. Replete with cyborgs, robots and special effects, it's calculated to provide nail-biting suspense. The plot orbits around an asteroid space base, Sigma, inhabited by humans and the target of attack by humanoid aliens. Also thrown in are a couple of love affairs—to keep audiences going. "I love fantasising," enthuses Bizeth.

◆ **Ravidas Mehrotra** has an unusual second home: a half-dozen jails in Uttar Pradesh. This fire-brand student leader has been in and out of jails with religious regularity—190 times in all. His usual offence is breach of peace. The last time he had the dubious distinction of being booked for demonstrating in support of Sanjay Singh.

Said the father of two school-going kids in between his 189th and 190th visits: "My wife understands and keeps my family together." For him, the repeated stints may soon bear fruit. *The Guinness Book of Records* is considering his case for a world record.



R.K GUPTA

Ravidas Mehrotra: jail junkets

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Bajaj Scooters

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The Great Hoax

Despite the massive amounts of money—and government claims of success—India's family planning programme is largely a farce. Statistics and official statements are misleading and the crude birth rate has remained static for a decade.

COVER STORY 82

In Election Mode

The ruling party is preparing for the coming elections. Strategy is being worked out and the new buzzword appears to be 'grassroots participation'. A list of candidates is being finalised and key groups set up to monitor progress.

SPECIAL REPORTS 26

A Murderous Tradition

For generations, Bhati villagers in feudal Rajasthan have practised female infanticide. The inevitable result has been that the sex ratio is heavily loaded against females. Only now are there signs that attitudes are changing. An exclusive report.

SPECIAL REPORTS 36

A Propaganda Ploy

The recent sacking of Doordarshan's director-general Bhaskar Ghose was clearly politically motivated. With elections around the corner, the ruling party seems determined to use this powerful medium as its propaganda tool.

SPECIAL REPORTS 40

Endless Delays, Sloppy Service

For the last few weeks, Indian Airlines passengers have had to suffer the ordeal of delayed flights and cancelled bookings. Though the shortage of aircraft is one reason, the malaise quite obviously goes much deeper. An analysis.

SPECIAL FEATURES 106

Colour in the Classrooms

Teenagers across the country are heralding something of a fashion revolution. The tastes themselves may be inspired by the West, but the trendy, new generation of teenagers is certainly indulging its obsession to look good. A report.

SPECIAL FEATURES 114

CONTENTS

COMMENT 11
CAPITALOOK 14
INDIANOTES 19
VOICES 20
THE FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 25
SPECIAL REPORTS
Congress(I): In Election Mode 26
Left Front: An Alliance Gone Sour 32
Rajasthan: A Murderous Tradition 36
Doordarshan: The Propaganda Ploy 40
CURRENT EVENTS
Opposition: Squabbling Leaders 47
Uttar Pradesh: Power Broker 48
Madhya Pradesh: Thorny Crown 53
Orissa: Broken Promises 54
Bihar: Talking Tough 59
Kerala: Hard Lessons 62
Azad's Memoirs: Still Secret 67
Punjab: Watery Woes 69
Bottomline: Seoul Searching 73
STATENOTES 76
COVER STORY
The Great Hoax 82
SPECIAL FEATURES
Salman Rushdie: Political Scapegoat 92
Smuggling: The Gold Rush 102
Aviation:
Endless Delays, Sloppy Service 106
Teenage Fashion:
Colour in the Classrooms 114
Narmada Valley Project:
A Flood of Controversies 118
TRADE WINDS 123
BUSINESS
Eighth Plan: A Time for Austerity 124
Madhya Pradesh: Torch Bearers 132
Leasing Companies: In the Dumps 134
GTC: The Call of Duty 139
New Issues: Luring Investors 145
The Markets: Scaling Peaks 154
THE ARTS
Painting:
Age of the Unknown Artists 156
Bombay: A Picture of Success 161
NEIGHBOURS
Burma: Girding for the Battle 162
MEDIAWATCH 165
SPORTS
XXIV Olympiad:
The Power and the Glory 166
GUEST COLUMN
Protecting the *Bicharas* 173
DEVELOPMENT
SYL Canal: Troubled Waters 174
EDUCATION
Engineering Colleges:
Wired for Trouble 182
BOOKS
Through Tinted Glasses 187
Bharat Darshan 188
High Romance 188
TELEVISION
Mahabharat: A Political Message 190
EYE-CATCHERS 192

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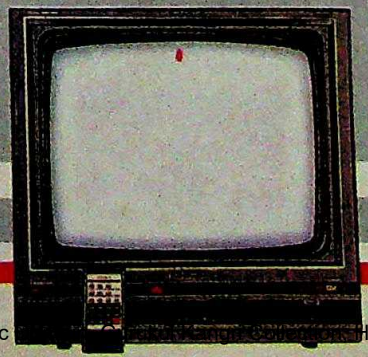

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A PREDICTABLE OUTCOME

The recently-concluded games ("Eastern Bloc-Buster", October 15) in Seoul were being discussed every day at the water-coolers and coffee machines in the US. We, of Indian descent, have no credible answer to India's performance, or shall we say, non-performance. The score-card at the XXIVth Olympiad sends powerful images to various countries and I hope this is causing as much anguish to all of you there as it is to us living abroad. How about taking sports out of the hands of itsy-bitsy politicians and challenging someone of the eminence of Jamshedji Tata to produce results?

Washington D.C. — AMIR TUTEJA

■ Indian hopes at Seoul have predictably flickered out. The hockey team finished sixth, P.T. Usha nearly came in last in the 400 metres hurdles heats, the boxers were sent crashing and, in general, the athletes have been at their lowest pitch. What do we do now? Who will the major scapegoats be? Let us hope that the Indian Olympic Association and other sports organisations at least give us an interesting post-mortem explanation of the debacle.

New Delhi — DEBASHIS PADHI

BASIC MALADIES

Our athletes, instead of being allowed to train on the tracks ("A Daunting Prospect", September 30) are forced to negotiate political hurdles and break red tapes of bureaucracy. They are kept so busy playing these games that the reality of their standards in the world arena dawns on them at the eleventh hour and everyone goes in for rigorous but futile training, coaching camps and talk of "tapping the young potential".

Udaipur — RAHUL GAUR

■ It is an axiom that the sporting level in any country is directly linked to its economic development. The fierce competition at international meets demands a huge investment in equipment, stadia, coaches, nutritious diet, sports medicine and the like. Let us accept reality, bitter as it may be—we are simply not developed enough to invest the required amount in sporting facilities. But given the required level of economic development, we too can produce gold medals by the dozen.

New Delhi — RANJAN P. THAKUR

■ The athletes themselves are not to blame. They will work to achieve excellence to the extent that the environment permits them to do so. Besides, the best efforts of the most gifted of athletes will come to nought in a nation that plans and administers the use of resources as poorly as we do.

Bangalore — G.S. CHANDY

THE PEN TRIUMPHS

The withdrawal of the Defamation Bill ("Conceding Defeat", October 15) has placed the ball in the journalists' court. They should now respond to the call given by the prime minister for a national dialogue on the subject of defamation. At the moment, though, the pen has indeed proved mightier than the sword.

Bombay — MANOJ JAYANTILAL SHAH

■ Prime ministers and film stars may come and go but we ought to, with all our might, defend and preserve the democratic system we have inherited. Democracy is about dissent and debate. About the freedom to express and expose, let the philosopher Voltaire speak for the Indian press: "I detest what you say, but I will defend until my death your right to say it."

London — SARTAJ CHAUDHARY

■ It is high time that we as a nation assured ourselves constitutionally of the right to information as the Americans have done. That alone can check the arrogance of power-drunk politicians, who tend to think of themselves as masters and believe that the job of the common citizen is to accept and obey them unconditionally.

Baroda — CHILLARIGI YOGANANDARAO

A FLASH OF LIGHT

For quite some time now, almost every magazine and newspaper has

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made depressing reading, because most reports cover killings, cheating and hoodwinking. I had nearly decided to stop all subscriptions and go into a private shell. But like this year's bounteous monsoon after years of drought, I read the illuminating story on the incomparable Mallikarjun Mansur ("The Fakir of Khayal", September 30) and felt that all is not so dark after all. The intimate photographs enhanced the story and gave us a deep insight into the personality of the man. I feel that we desperately need to know that there is a brighter side to life, however much eclipsed.

Pune — B.K.J. RAO

AIRY COMMENT

Apropos the praise for Vijaypat Singhania ("Brave New Whirl", September 30) by Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Mrs Sheila Dixit, that "you people in the air do much more for the country than those of us on the ground...", did she have in mind the fact that a pilot in the air is worth two on the ground—in her office?

Bangalore — GODFREY NAZARETH

EXTERNAL TRAPPINGS

With reference to "A Slow Yen for Change" (September 30), we invariably find that Japanese concepts are conceived only at the managerial level and workers are consequently expected to adhere to the systems. The result is a mere imitation of the Japanese way without our being able to inculcate a sense of values among the workers. Naturally, the situation is characterised by a lack of sincere participation from all sectors. We have a long way to go before we understand the philosophy behind the Japanese system.

New Delhi — SANJAY VIRMANI

■ Imitation may be the best form of flattery but blindly copying the Japanese without realising the differences between the conditions in Japan and those in our own country is an exercise in futility. The Japanese *Kanban* or Just-In-Time inventory control is impractical in India due to a variety of reasons—transport bottlenecks, labour problems, load-shedding and so on. What is detailed in the article is the external trappings like a common canteen for managers and workers, uniforms for every one and 'open' offices.

Pune — D.B.N. MURTHY

JINGLE MAGIC

I entirely agree with the opinion expressed in "Targeting the Tots" (September 30) that "children enjoy the commercials far more than the serials themselves". Whenever my three-year-old son hears the advertisement jingles, he comes running to stand rooted before the TV. He also frequently presents me with flowers saying "Happy Birthday Mummy" (Vicks Vaporub) and each time he is called urgently, says: "Two Minutes" (Maggie Noodles). One night I was stunned to find him repeating in his sleep the Rin jingle: *"Yeh yeh yeh, paise bachenge."*

Begusarai, Bihar — MITRA DEVA

■ You report that film maker Shekhar Kapoor 'muses' on the impact of TV commercials on the economically backward child. The children in the article—who are the focus of various media research programmes—are, in a sense, not the real Indian children, but the over-nourished babies of a pampered elite. We are still waiting for a report on how milk-foods, chocolates, biscuits, ice-creams, jams and toys of TV commercials are affecting the lives of the country's forgotten children to whom even clean drinking water is as yet a luxury.

Ahmednagar — PETER GONSALVES

FREAKY PIECE

The article on campus slang ("Zapping up the Ulti Lingo", September 30) made interesting reading, evoking the nostalgia of our college days when we were part and parcel of the "freaky slang scene man". Each word, acronym or piece of slang is emotionally bound to these young people in their daily lives and cuts across the regional borders of the *gults* (Andhraites), the *maddus* (Tamils), the *mallus* (Malayalis), the *gobis/surds* (Sikhs), the *bongs* (Bengalis) and the *harrys, dings and papads*. Now, a couple of years after leaving college, the feeling is strong—"Where's the stuff gone man?"

Jamshedpur — JAYANTA RAY

■ I would like to add some slang to your article. Like, you feel great to be called SHIT (Smart Handsome Indian Teenager), but you won't get the membership of FOSLA (Frustrated One Sided Lovers' Association) unless you are a Frustro (frustrated) case.

Sindri, Bihar — PRANAY KUMAR

■ When the world around us is in the process of modernisation, in my view, it couldn't be pernicious to society if the Moscos (Modern Student Communities) keep alive this bonsaification process in their campuses. Indeed, it is a creative, recreative and not-so-reprobate activity.

Trichur, Kerala — JOSE VARGHESE

SMART MOVE

The army's belated decision ("Packing More Punch", September 15) to equip infantrymen with lighter and more lethal personal weapons is a wise one. In our army it is a foot-soldier's robustness and his regimental training, rather than his cumbersome weapons and ill-fitting equipment, that see him through combat operations. A case in point is his helmet, so important and yet one that resembles an old cooking pot upturned on his head. A soldier's fighting kit should indeed help him do just that—fight.

Palghat, Kerala — CHANDROO KUNNETH

THE BLOODY TRUTH

With reference to the review of Allan Sealy's book *The Trotter-Nama* by Khushwant Singh ("Of Curries and Custard", September 15) I write to protest his failure to establish facts about the Anglo-Indian community. I suppose he doesn't realise that he has wounded the feelings of this community. Anglo-Indians do have European blood as can be proved by the fact that most of us have documents showing that our forefathers were European. That our parents chose not to apply for British passports (at a time when many Indians were scrambling to get them), proves their own brand of Indianness and patriotism.

New Delhi — LESLEY ANNE RAYMER

SPELLING ASSASSINATION

Along with the article ("Pressure on the Press", September 30) is a photograph of the demonstration by our political leaders against the Defamation Bill. I was amused to read the spellings on a placard which read: "A Leapard can not be come a pet dog by removing a few sports" (*sic*). This should, of course, read: "A leopard cannot become a pet dog by removing a few spots." I am sure you will agree with me that we do need a defamation bill, at least one which prevents "defamation of spelling".

Madras — H.N. RAMAKRISHNA

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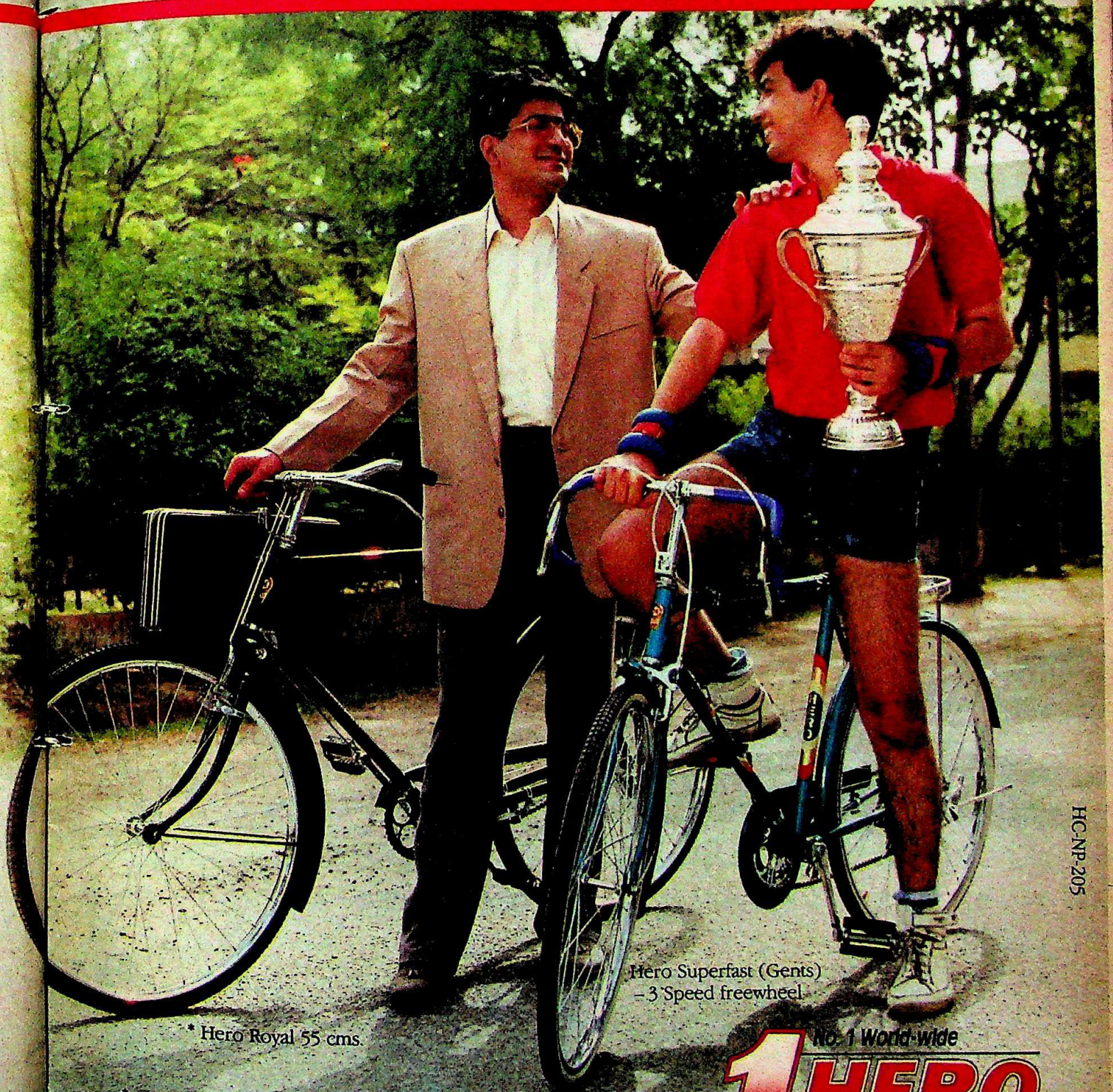

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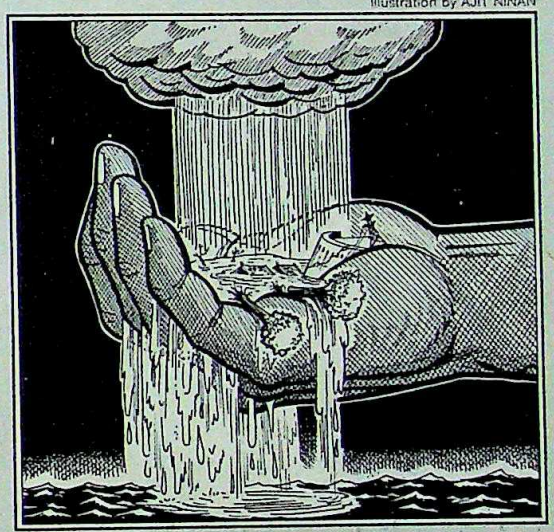
Mishandling Nature's Bounty

THE cataclysmic phenomenon of crippling droughts being followed by devastating floods in huge areas of the land is like nature's own organised laboratory demonstration of what happens when a people ignore the ecology of their environment. Nature has made it as plain as daylight that the man-made phenomena that cause severe drought are the very ones that contribute to floods: deforestation, waterlogging, siltation. They reveal a woeful neglect of the land and the total absence of a calibrated management of the two resources without which life itself is not possible: land and water.

Drought does not only mean a lack of rainfall. It means, more importantly, the exhaustion of soil moisture and the depletion of underground water reserves. And floods do not mean just excessive rainfall. They mean the unbridled run-off of rainwater and soil into the riverbeds. But nature did not plan it that way. Man did. What nature made and man unmade was a system whereby forests and vegetation would absorb rainwater like sponges and let it seep gently into the ground from where, as if by a release mechanism, the water would trickle into the rivers from their catchment or watershed areas all year round.

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



But because of massive deforestation and loss of vegetal cover the sponges have disappeared. Rainwater hits the catchment areas and instead of being absorbed it simply erodes huge quantities of precious topsoil and cascades into the river basins in massive quantities. The accompanying soil raises the level of the riverbeds, and floods occur. And the bountiful water is rendered a curse. Most of it simply flows out into the sea.

Because it "runs off" into the sea or evaporates, it does not percolate and recharge the depleted underground water tables, thus damning the land to another year of severe drought if the rains fail again. The tragedy is that rainless years need not cause the agricultural and economic devastation they presently do. It has been demonstrated even in the driest parts of Rajasthan that good rains once every four or five years are enough to sustain vegetation during the drier years.

And herein lies the crux of the matter. Water run-off can be prevented. If the water is preserved underground through various basic, common sense, and relatively inexpensive methods, at least drinking water for man and beast—if not for crop irrigation through wells—is available even when the rains fail. Among the greatest failures of the Government during the last 40 years has been its lack of commitment and inability to institute an integrated and comprehensive scheme of land and water management—the most rudimentary anti-poverty measure. This calls for increasing vegetation in denuded catchment areas, and conserving rainwater in order to keep underground water tables recharged.

More than 15 years ago, as the problems of soil erosion and water run-off began to be highlighted as blights on economic development, Mrs Gandhi issued a directive asking for creation of a Central Land Use Commission. Nothing came of it. The sixth plan also recognised that "the continued degradation of land resources is the most important threat to economic progress." But these words were not matched by allocation of resources for better land management. Rajiv Gandhi's first major speech highlighted the socio-economic crisis caused directly by improper land management. And he created the National Wastelands Development Board and the National Land Use and Conservation Board to deal with the problem. The first organisation, starved for funds, achieved nothing, while the second one has not even held a meeting for two years.

Rajiv Gandhi's tenure has coincided with a prolonged drought. One would have imagined, that with his commitment to ecology, at least some fundamental drought-proofing activities would have been undertaken in an organised fashion across the land. The work—aimed at preserving groundwater—consists of levelling and terracing land, building contour trenches to store rainwater, constructing small check dams, digging and restoring small tanks and drains, and planting hardy grasses. India's villages already have about 500,000 small tanks which are badly in need of regular cleaning and deepening in order to permit rainwater to percolate into the ground instead of evaporating.

During the first three years of the current five year plan, the Government spent about Rs 44,000 per hectare to bring 1.5 million hectares of land under irrigation through major and medium irrigation projects. But it spent no more than Rs 1880 crore—Rs 107 per hectare—on forestry and soil and water conservation in order to ameliorate the plight of degraded lands. Scientists in the country have now begun to awake to the need to change what are obviously twisted priorities. Of the country's 50 million hectares under irrigation, 22 million depend on groundwater—that still remains the biggest and most productive source of irrigation.

And yet, even during 1987, when the drought worsened, and relief schemes for the affected mushroomed, there was no concerted effort to take up drought-proofing—something which should have been done on a war footing. So this year's nectar from the gods—the bounteous monsoon that broke the drought—will provide but short-term relief. Most of its waters, alas, will just go down the drain.

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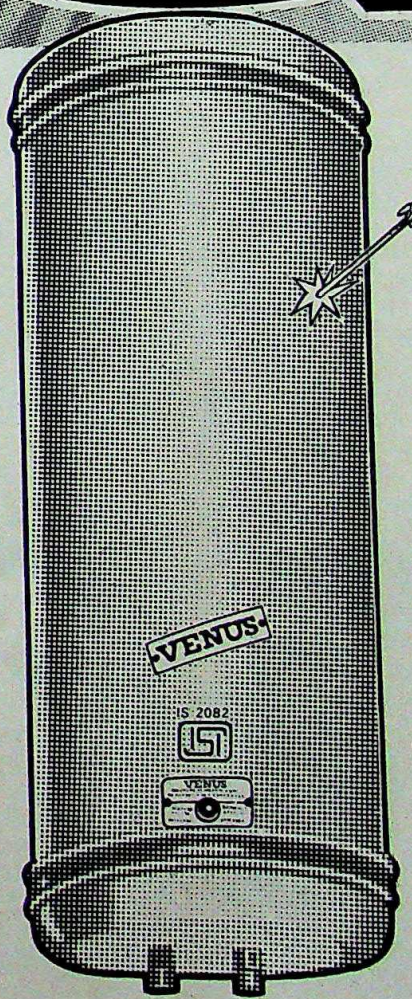

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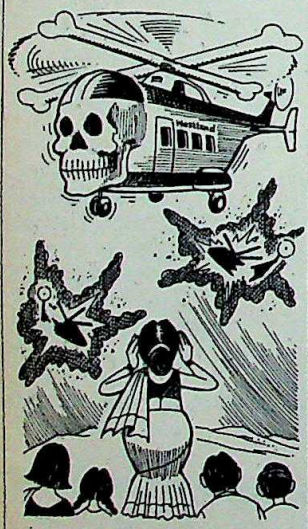
Convincing Case

● The controversy over India's purchase of Westland helicopters is not about to fade away. Not if Sanghamitra Gupta can help it. On July 14, her husband Tapan Gupta, 48, and elder daughter Srilekha, 19, were killed when a Westland chopper run by Pawan Hans crashed near the Panchi View helipad en route to the Vaishnodevi shrine.

The feisty widow has written letters to key members of Parliament demanding a fresh investigation. "The question that haunts my mind," she wrote, "is that, was it necessary to make human lives the guinea pigs for experimentation with a provenly substandard helicopter?"

To bolster her case, Sanghamitra conducted an exhaustive research into aviation rules, safety, weather patterns and the history and mechanical performance of



the helicopter. The engine problems she researched include worn-out rotor blades, spurious clutch drums, oil leakages, and failures in the electronic engine control unit. "These helicopters had been grounded by the US Government. So how could they find entry in a commercial service run by the Government?" she wrote. That's also what several MPs want to know and they have written to the prime minister asking for an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge.

Shifting Game

● Political tongues are wagging in the nation's capital that Jammu & Kashmir's popular Governor, Jagmohan, may not complete his term which is expected to expire in November 1989.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

The reason is not that the Centre is unhappy with him. The prime minister has been advised to pull Jagmohan out of Srinagar as many believe that he could be an important addition to the Cabinet in a pre-election year. Jagmohan has already been sounded out by the high command on whether he would be willing to join as minister for urban development.

Even as he makes up his mind, there's another group of senior Congressmen that does not want to see him moved anywhere. This group feels that Kashmir is headed for a period of instability and the one man most capable of handling the situation if it gets worse is Jagmohan, who had established a deep rapport with the people when the state was under governor's rule. A firm decision is expected in November.

Unfair Exchange

● Recently, the to-and-fro between South Block and the French Embassy has been more marked. The Foreign Office has, at the behest of the prime minister, asked the French to come up with something better for their return festival due to start with a laser-aided show on Bombay's Chowpati beach in February.

Apparently, the blueprint for the Festival of France has not pleased New Delhi's mandarins. One of them fired off angry letters accusing the French of not keeping their promises. It seems France was to have sent its fabulous bronzes and former premier Jacques Chirac had even hinted at a visit by the lady with the enigmatic smile when he came to New Delhi in 1975. But the Mona Lisa is not going anywhere after her encounter with vandals.

Art buffs feel the French

ought to send exhibitions coated with the dust of history as India sent its *creme de la ancient creme* to France in 1985. But the French feel the proposed exhibition of 80 masterworks of French painting, from the impressionists to the contemporary, represent their *pieces de resistance*. The dialogue continues. In Rome you do as the Romans; but in India, you do as the Russians—who have sent three very significant exhibitions. *C'est la vie.*

Still Waiting

● Customs officers all over the country are still waiting

for their promised windfall from the Government. The story goes back to Jan Morcha leader V.P. Singh's tenure as finance minister. His innovative schemes to wean officials away from the temptation of sharing the booty of smugglers included giving generous rewards to officials who recovered contraband goods.

But a lesser known scheme was the creation of a welfare fund to be used for constructing guest-houses in the lower Himalayas and the Western Ghats for officials holidaying with their families.

The fund's kitty, three years since it started, has now swelled to a whopping Rs 15 crore through government contributions. But still no guest-houses. Senior officials in the ministry say that their list of priorities has changed and that some of the funds will be used for the purchase of equipment like wireless sets, walkie-talkies and boats. The guest-houses—and their now somewhat restive guests—will have to wait.

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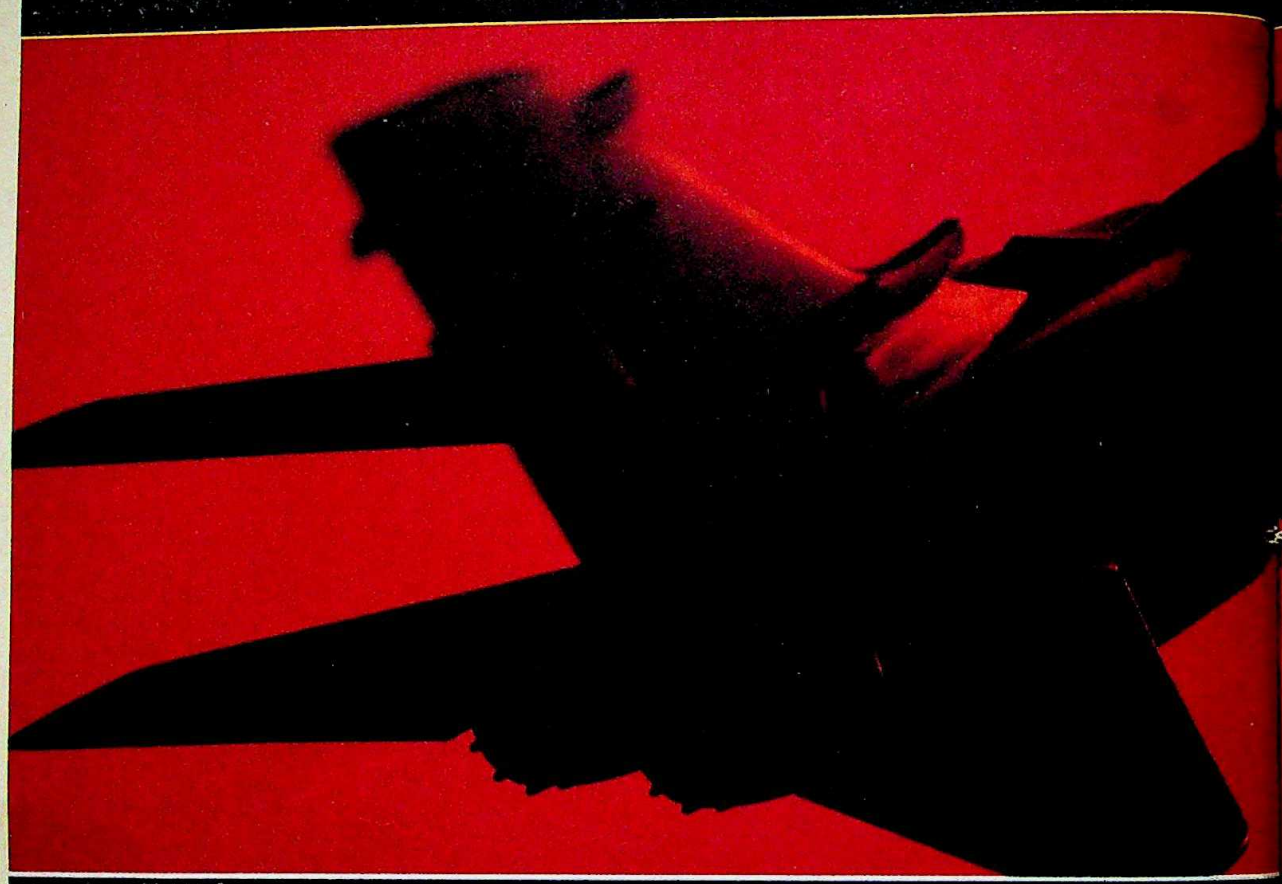

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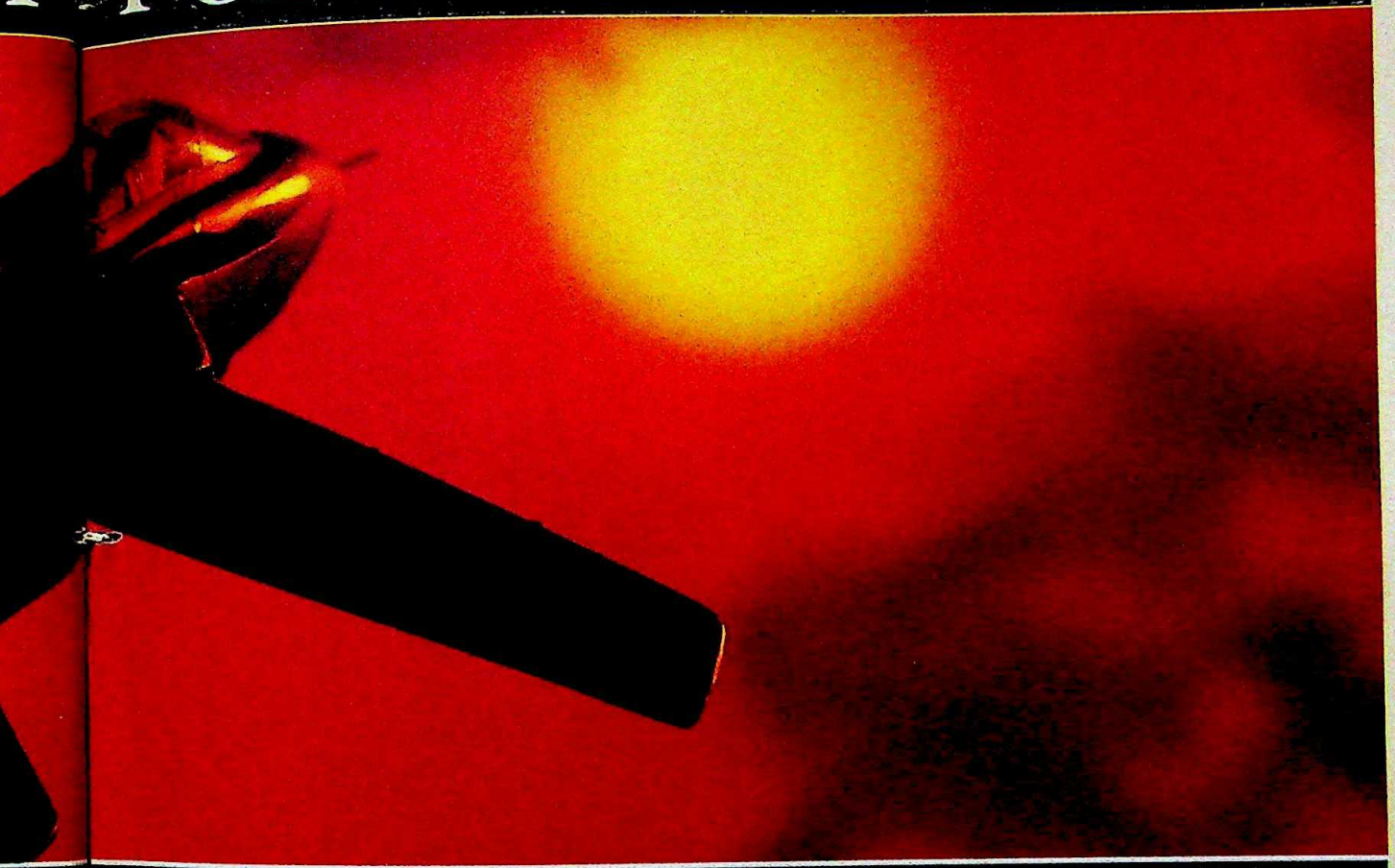
PCL COMPUTERS



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Certainly not!

said my wife.
"But ..." I said
"After all we don't construct a house every Sunday", She said.

"But ..." I said.
"Nothing doing" she said.

"Get Super JK Cement, d'you hear?" She said storming out of the room.

"Yes dear!" I said.

You see in 27 years of our marriage, I've always had the last word .

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SUPER JK CEMENT

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THE FINAL RING

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

■ Indians respect the dead—whatever the status of the deceased. And sometimes, this reverence can be stretched to include all sorts of people—and things. Even a telephone.

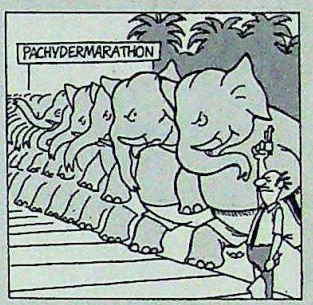
In Kanpur, incensed by the utter failure of the telephone system, which in several cases had become as dead as a dodo, hundreds of residents took to the streets to register their protest. They even took out a funeral procession for a dead telephone through the crowded lanes of the city.

The demonstrators deemed it fit to hire a carriage for the solemn occasion. On it they carried the departed soul—a huge plywood telephone instrument, covered with flowers. And in keeping with tradition, they even chanted the good lord's name as they moved along. The cremation ground: the main telephone exchange of the city. Tributes for the dead telephone poured in from the local business community. Long may it live.

A JUMBO EVENT

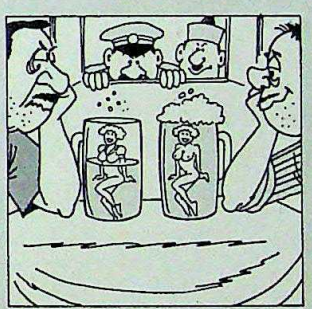
■ The marathon—that long-distance gruelling race for men and women—was first popularised by the Greeks. But two French companies seem to be all set to give it a new dimension: what they have in mind is a marathon for elephants.

In April 1989 four districts in the southern state of Kerala will see the tuskers kicking up a lot of dust as they thunder ahead to decide which of them is the fastest of all. As many as thirty-five behemoths are to participate in each of the districts. The races start from Trichur district on April 5.



Organising this 21-km-long, earth-shaking event are two French companies in cooperation with the Indian Tourism Development Corporation, the Kerala Tourism Development Department and the Elephants Welfare Committee. It is not known if doping tests are on the agenda.

THE BARE TRUTH



■ They were a hot-selling item. Two Hyderabad crockery shopowners were recently peddling what they called "blue magic glasses". As chilled water or beer was poured into the glasses, a picture of a semi-nude woman on them would alter dramatically—the woman's skimpy clothing would disappear and she would become totally nude.

The "magic" worked in reverse as well: as you sip the liquid in the glass, the woman would again get dressed, albeit scantily.

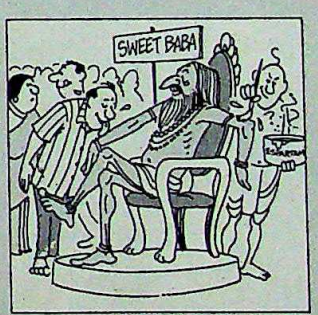
The two enterprising shopkeepers were doing brisk business in these glasses. That is till the spoilsport local police decided to step in. They raided the shops, seized 210 glasses worth Rs 5,000, and arrested both the men.

The police also spilled the beans about the "magic" in the glasses—acccording to them, imported stickers did the trick.

SWEET NOTHINGS

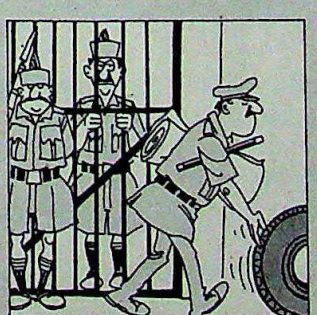
■ Miracle men adopt names, one more exotic than the other. After Mahesh Yogi, Bhagwan Rajneesh, the self-professed doctor of love, we now have a slightly odd one: "Sweet Baba". And sweet he is—true to his name.

This swami from sugar-rich Maharashtra claimed that anyone "running his tongue over my body would find a sweet taste all along". But this sweetness on his person was exposed recently by a rationalist, B. Premanand, chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of Paranormals, Indian branch.



The secret of his sweetness: a new concoction called espartami, said to be 800 times sweeter than sugar and 400 times sweeter than saccharin, with which he massaged his body under the guidance of a self-professed para-psychologist. The body may be sweet but the truth is bitter.

BEING POLICED



■ There was a time when robbing was restricted to professional thieves. Times they are achanging. Now people from the other side—policemen—appear to be in the thick of it.

Recently a truck carrying flowers to Guntur from Bangalore met with an accident near Chandragiri, 12 km from Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh. Ramesh, a police constable, was sent to conduct a preliminary inquiry. The custodian of the law, though, had a fault which is rapidly become common—he just couldn't resist the temptation to make an easy buck. And so he stole a tyre, two tarpaulins and a jockey from the accident spot with the connivance of local villagers.

But sometimes an easy buck can come to mean hard times. Thanks to the truck driver's complaint Ramesh is now locked in custody—with an inquiry to boot.

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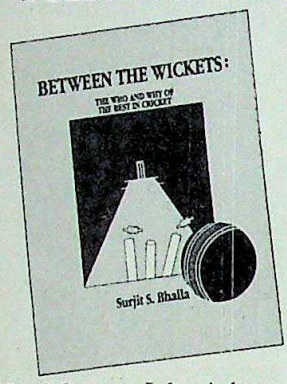

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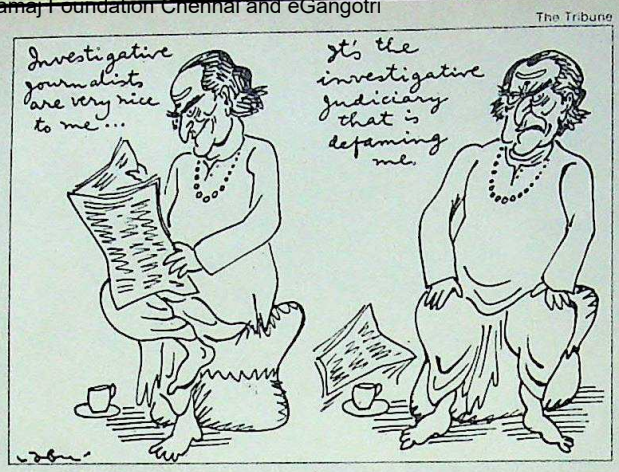

• *Though the prime minister is putting up a brave face, he (too) is panicky about the developments (launching of the National Front) which might cost him his job.* ■ P. UPENDRA, Telugu Desam leader, in *The Sunday Observer*

• *My concept of opposition unity is different from that of those who consider me an obstacle.* ■ CHANDRA SHEKHAR in *Probe India*

• *Doordarshan has greater credibility today. Nobody can now accuse us of a bias.* ■ BHASKAR GHOSH, former director-general Doordarshan, in *Imprint*

• *The so-called high command is not higher than the (Congress-I) Working Committee. I have every right to make a suggestion as an old and senior worker.* ■ KAMALAPATI TRIPATHI in *The Telegraph*

• *I don't deny that Linda (his wife) influenced my decision to surrender...I have no hesitation to admit that she alone was 25 per cent responsible for this (the Tripura) accord.* ■ BIJOY KUMAR HRANGKHAWL, TNV chief, in *The Week*

• *To kill one bird with one stone is not politics. But to kill 20 or 30 birds with one stone is politics. It took me several years to acquire this knowledge.* ■ SUBHAS GHISING in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *I've paid a tremendous price for voicing an independent opinion. I don't think anyone else has paid such a price.* ■ Lt-General (Retd.) MISBAH MAYADAS on the Bofors deal in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

• *If all that Pepsi is going to teach us is to peel potatoes without losing the nutritional substance just under the peel, then surely we could have done without such assistance.* ■ Editorial comment in the *Indian Express*

• *We didn't come here for anybody's birthday bash.* ■ BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, on *The Times of India* advertising the Human Rights Now! concert as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations, quoted in the daily

• *The Indian Hockey Federation itself is being run by bogus people. I can't even call them pimps...that is too respectable.* ■ ASLAM SHER KHAN in *Surya India*

• *I ran to remove the impression that I was afraid to lose.* ■ P.T. USHA, after failing to qualify in the 400m hurdles heats in Seoul, quoted in *The Times of India*

• *I'm not Miss Goody. No way. I'm as normal as anybody else and I've got the same desires.* ■ SONU WALIA in *Cine Blitz*

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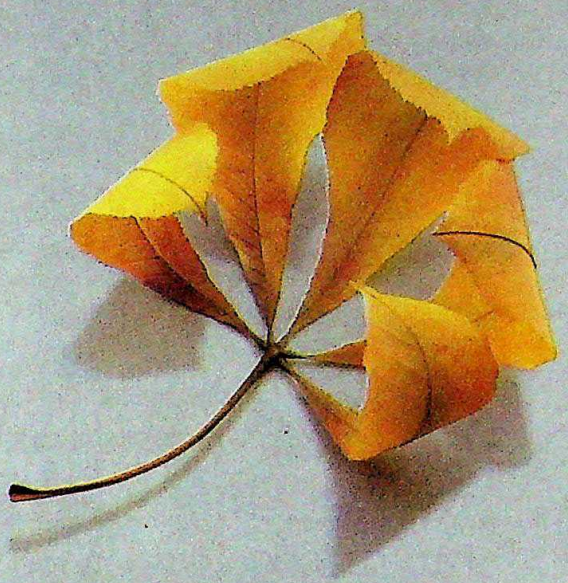
IF THIS IS HOW YOU FEEL AFTER LONG-HAUL FLYING,



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Electoral Straws

THERE was a perceptible quickening in the pulsebeat of the fortnight that was. Suddenly, and without much warning, there is a new energy and purpose in the march of time. The inspiration for all this is a distant drum beat—the next general election that looms ever-larger on the country's political horizon. Almost overnight, it would seem, politics is back in fashion.

In the backrooms of the power brokers, the weapons of the electoral battle are being sharpened to suit the strategy. Soon, the foot-soldiers and generals will fan out into dusty hamlets and arid wastelands to preach their gospels of propaganda. Ready or not, the bugles of the electoral war are already being heard.

It is perhaps no coincidence that television sets across the country once again reverberate to the clash of arms in the eternal contest of Good vs Evil as another electronic epic, the *Mahabharat*, unfolds before our eyes.

The coming electoral contest, whether preponed or staged as scheduled, will almost certainly rank as the most epic political battle in the country's independent history. Rarely have the stakes been so high—and the choice less inspiring.

As the Opposition's parody of unification drags on to its weary denouement, and the ruling party desperately attempts to revive its sagging image, the electorate is poised on the horns of a painful dilemma. On one side a gaggle of squabbling sophists. On the other, a party captive to capriciousness and compromise.

Even though the elections are still many months away, the sudden flurry of political activity signposts the fact that both opponents know they are rapidly running out of time—and credibility. The longer the Opposition takes to arrive at its final political form, the less its chances of unseating the incumbents. The irony is that the two sides have seemingly different but essentially similar handicaps.

The Opposition's problem is that it has too many leaders with over-inflated ambition but only one man with the requisite credibility, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, himself a reluctant candidate. For the ruling party, the slump in its popular appeal and the future of its fortunes also revolve around one man, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The surprise sacking of the director-general of Doordarshan and the prolonged exposure to Rajiv in the newscasts make it obvious that the incident was electorally linked. As the most powerful medium in the hands of the ruling party, television will now become its main propaganda weapon. The process has already begun. The parade of ministerial faces on the screen; the televised interrogation of a terrorist; the laying down of arms by Gorkhaland activists; Indian involvement in Sri Lanka and the trumpeting of dubious achievements.

The new electorally-oriented mood is equally reflected in Rajiv's busy schedule of domestic tours to crucial states like Tamil Nadu and Punjab and crucial constituencies like Kashipur. It is, sadly, also reflected in the government ban of Salman Rushdie's latest novel, an action obviously tailored to cater to the fundamentalists and the Muslim vote.

The tragedy is that apart from more sops and compromises, nothing much is likely to change between now and the time the elections roll around. The Opposition may come together today and fall apart tomorrow. Rajiv and the ruling party may make promises today and go back on them the day after. What the choice will eventually boil down to is as tragic—between the evil of the two lessers.

—DILIP BOBB

Ready or not, the bugles of the electoral war are already being heard.

Rarely have the stakes been so high—and the choice less inspiring.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

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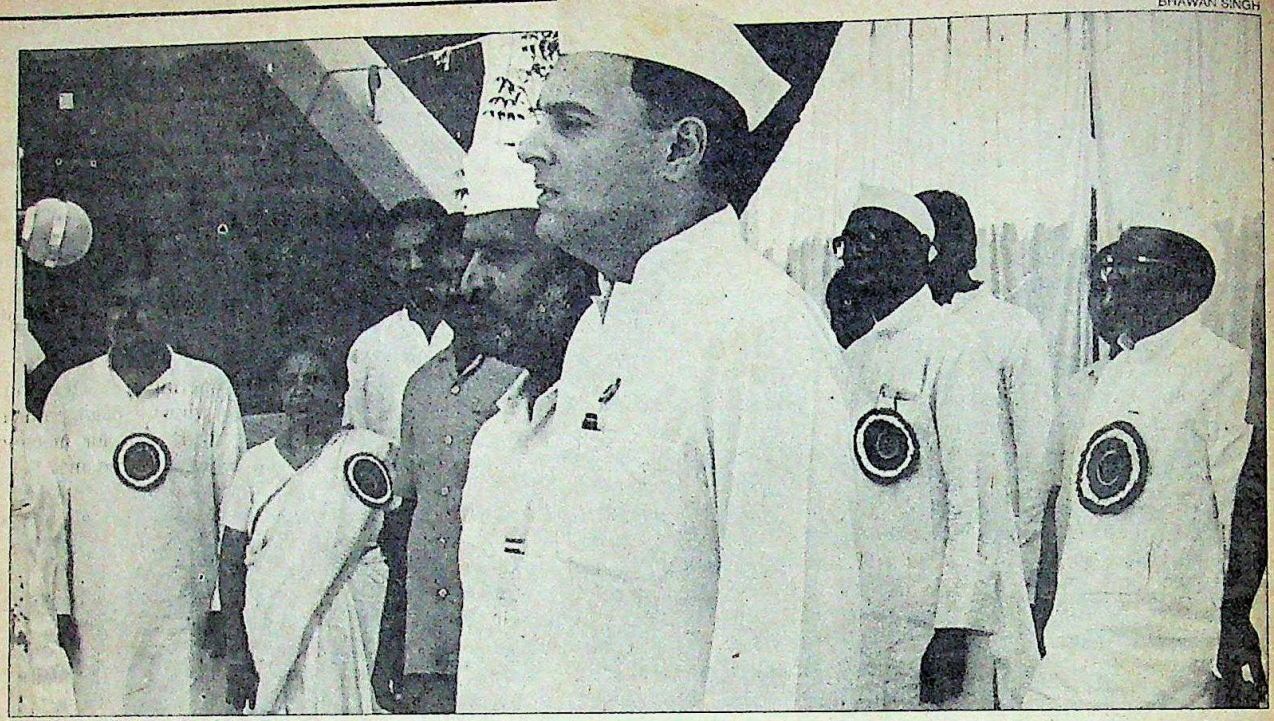
BHAWAN SINGH



CONGRESS(I)

In Election Mode

While opposition parties have been hogging the headlines with their unity moves, the Congress(I) has not exactly been slumbering. Quietly but steadily, the creaky organisation is beginning to oil its springs and flex its muscles in preparation for the electoral challenge that is already in the air. A report from Executive Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR and Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA:

A somewhat decrepit government bungalow on New Delhi's Teenmurti Marg has been transformed, almost overnight it seems, into a beehive of activity. Stenos clatter away at typewriters, documents marked "confidential" go in and out of there and Congress(I) MPs bustle around within its portals.

It is here that preparations are now under way for the general elections due in December 1989 or perhaps, because of the good monsoon, even a mid-term poll. The prime minister's advisers have been giving him conflicting advice on the issue and whether there will be early elections is still a matter of conjecture. But Rajiv Gandhi is known to be unpredictable and a snap decision by him cannot be ruled out. The activities within the newly-formed Congress Committee for Programmes and Policies, however, smack of election fever. The committee's job, says V.N. Gadgil, its Chairman, is to "put together the views of party leaders and workers on election issues." Adds Rajya Sabha member from Maharashtra, Vishwajit Prithwijit Singh: "We actually function as a think-tank. We identify issues, feed them to our local bodies and pass the feedback from them to the prime minister and the Congress Working Committee."

Why, one may ask, has Rajiv Gandhi and his party created yet another organisation when bureaucracies and organisations already proliferate in confusion? The answer: this is a major pre-election exercise which Rajiv wishes should be conducted from outside the party's regular structure. Party bigwigs candidly admit that the Congress(I), nervous about opposition unity moves and the dip in its popularity as shown by opinion polls, is already in election mode. By December, lists of MPs are expected to be finalised and candidates told to begin electioneering quietly. And the blueprint of an election manifesto and a viable slogan (along the lines of the catchy "a government that works", that worked so well in 1980), are expected to be prepared.

As the party gears up for its propaganda campaign, a high-level advisory committee is on the cards. It will be responsible for manufacturing and spreading buzz-words and catch-phrases and all the bafflegab that regularly accompany the polls. Scouting for members

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Rajiv addressing partymen in Delhi: reaching out

who are to have special access to the prime minister outside party channels are a handful of trusted aides under the overall guidance of the prime minister's close lieutenant Captain Satish Sharma. Among the names being discussed are Rajiv's Doon School friend Romi Chopra, Bombay-based Rediffusion ad agency chief Arun "Bunny" Nanda, telecom wizard Sam Pitroda, and Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Sheila Dixit.

Some of the parameters along which the next election will be fought have already been defined. The emphasis will be on achieving grassroots participation by luring disgruntled partymen back into the fold, mending fences between rivals in the party, pushing through electoral reforms, resuscitating panchayati raj to decentralise decision-making and reforming the 20-point programme.

Of pivotal significance is "reform". The Congress(I) in its re-election avatar will be a party dedicated to it. But since the Congress(I) is out to win votes and power, the reforms do not stem entirely from founts of altruism. The motivation, rather, is the desire to take the best advantage of the political climate. That the party's interest, in many cases, is also in the public interest may be a matter of pure coincidence. But says Tariq Anwar, the young chief of the Bihar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee: "Only the Congress can think in terms of what is good for the country as a whole, and it's fully equipped to bring about these changes."

ELECTORAL reform, for example, is a measure whose time has come. And the man most tenaciously promoting it—Jan Morcha leader Vishwanath Pratap Singh—has so far stolen a march over the ruling party on the issue. Added to his cry of delinking big money from politics is the opposition demand for proportional representation. The Congress(I) has been defensive on the issue so far. Not any longer. The principal mission of the new think-tank is to take the sting out of opposition demands by championing the same causes and coming up with specific sets of proposals packaged as reforms but which are simultaneously advantageous to the party. However, Vishwajit Prithwijit Singh traces the origin of the new ideas to the party itself. "The ideas on which we are working are the concerns expressed by grassroots workers who attended party seminars," he says.

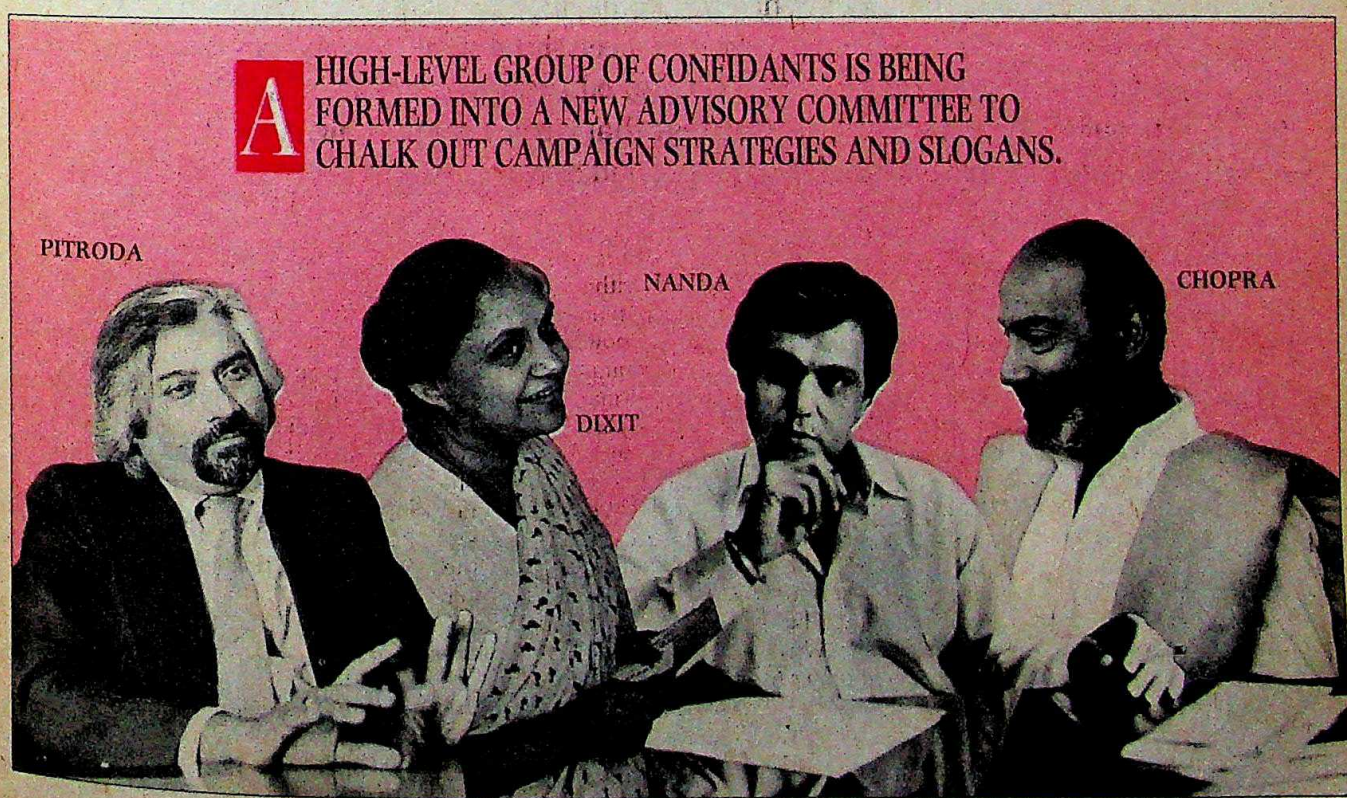
The manifesto on electoral reform now getting the finishing touches is expected to reject outright the demand for proportional representation, recommend a multi-member election commission, ignore demands for shortening the electioneering period, and make the argument that state funding of elections—a demand V.P. Singh has been making—is impractical. In fact, the party favours doing away with the Rs 1.5 lakh-limit on what an aspiring MP can spend on an election. Other recommendations include:

► Holding election officials responsible for disqualifying people from voting. Those disqualified will have the chance to immediately contest the decision. All chief electoral officers should be from outside the state.

► Providing each candidate with 12 to 16 voters' lists, offering petrol and printing facilities, allowing use of government schools and playgrounds for meetings and guaranteeing one free mailing of campaign literature. Identification slips will be posted to all voters along with sample ballot papers.

It looks like an attractive package, but as V.P. Singh commented: "It is like a sleight of hand. The major issue of big money in politics distorting the whole process is hardly tackled." Others feel that even in the new scheme of things, the ruling party will always have the advantage because the bureaucracy is bound to favour its candidates when it comes to mass mailings and the like.

The other major item on the Congress(I) election menu designed to take the wind out of the Opposition sail is decentralisation. The Opposition has for long been demanding municipal elections



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and implementation of panchayati raj, a key part of the directive principles of state policy in the Constitution. And Congress(I) is just about ready to thrust these very demands down the Opposition's collective throat. Not because the Opposition wants it, but because the Congress(I) needs it.

One thing that became abundantly clear during the recent party seminars and brainstorming sessions was that the party had become so centralised that political patronage at the state and local levels—the electoral bread and butter for the party's district and state committees—had begun to suffer. The major thrust of the manifesto in this regard—apart from holding municipal, pradhan and pramukh elections in order to test its strength and place loyalists in place—is to revive the zilla parishads to which elections have not been held for a decade in most of the Congress(I)-ruled states.

While it is unlikely that zilla parishad elections will be held in the near future because of the nightmarish logistics and expenses involved, the party will promise to take major steps to revive them. The parishads and their chairmen have been generally unpopular with MPs and MLAs because they function as competing and countervailing centres of power at the district levels.

But in the Congress(I) seminars, it was pointed out that grassroots involvement goes hand in hand with grassroots patronage which must reside in the hands of locally-elected officials. In promising elections and greater power to the zilla parishads, the Congress(I) manifesto is also likely to recommend that a key power now available to IAS and IPS officials—writing adverse reports about district officials and using the prevention of goondaism acts to declare people "bad characters"—be taken away from them and the responsibility assigned to the parishads and local politicians.

THE main thrust of this exercise is to bring the district administrations under the more effective supervision of local politicians. Decentralisation, certainly, but also motivated by a lesson learned from the Allahabad by-election in which government officials refused to misuse the official machinery on behalf of the Congress(I) candidate. Under the new proposals, confidential reports on district superintendents of police and district magistrates, now written by ministers or divisional commissioners, will be written by parishad chairmen.

Also in the name of "reforming" the 20-point programme (an almost uniform demand and one also voiced by the Opposition) schemes such as the National Rural Employment Programme and the Integrated Rural Development Programme will come under the scrutiny and administration of the parishads. The professed aim is to weed out the corruption that eats away programme funds before they reach the poor. But as one opposition cynic put it: "It's all very clever. They've taken three key issues raised by the Opposition—electoral reform, decentralisation and corruption in the anti-poverty programmes—and made them part of Congress(I)'s own reform package. But the changes will help the ruling party. Only the middle men will change."

There is, however, no doubt that Congress(I)—whatever the political motive—is making a genuine effort to reach out of New Delhi and woo the states and localities. And the initiative is being taken by the prime minister. Immediately after his China visit, he is expected to tour the nation non-stop in order to talk to disgruntled party members who, an aide said "have felt left out of the political process and the party over the last few years. The prime minister will use his personal touch to win them back". The meetings are expected to be conducted at the villages in the presence of MLAs and MPs of the area. Before the elections, the All India Congress(I) Committee (AICC-I) is also expected to hold four marathon sessions.

The attempt to win over the disgruntled partymen has already begun. The party high command has given out orders that nominations to mandi samitis and cooperatives should go to Congressmen who have been sidelined in the past. They will also be offered sops like ration shops, and dealerships in items like kerosene and

TRUSTED BUREAUCRATS ARE MONITORING SOME OF THE ACTIVITIES OF MINISTERS CHARGED WITH GETTING PARTY MACHINERY IN GEAR.

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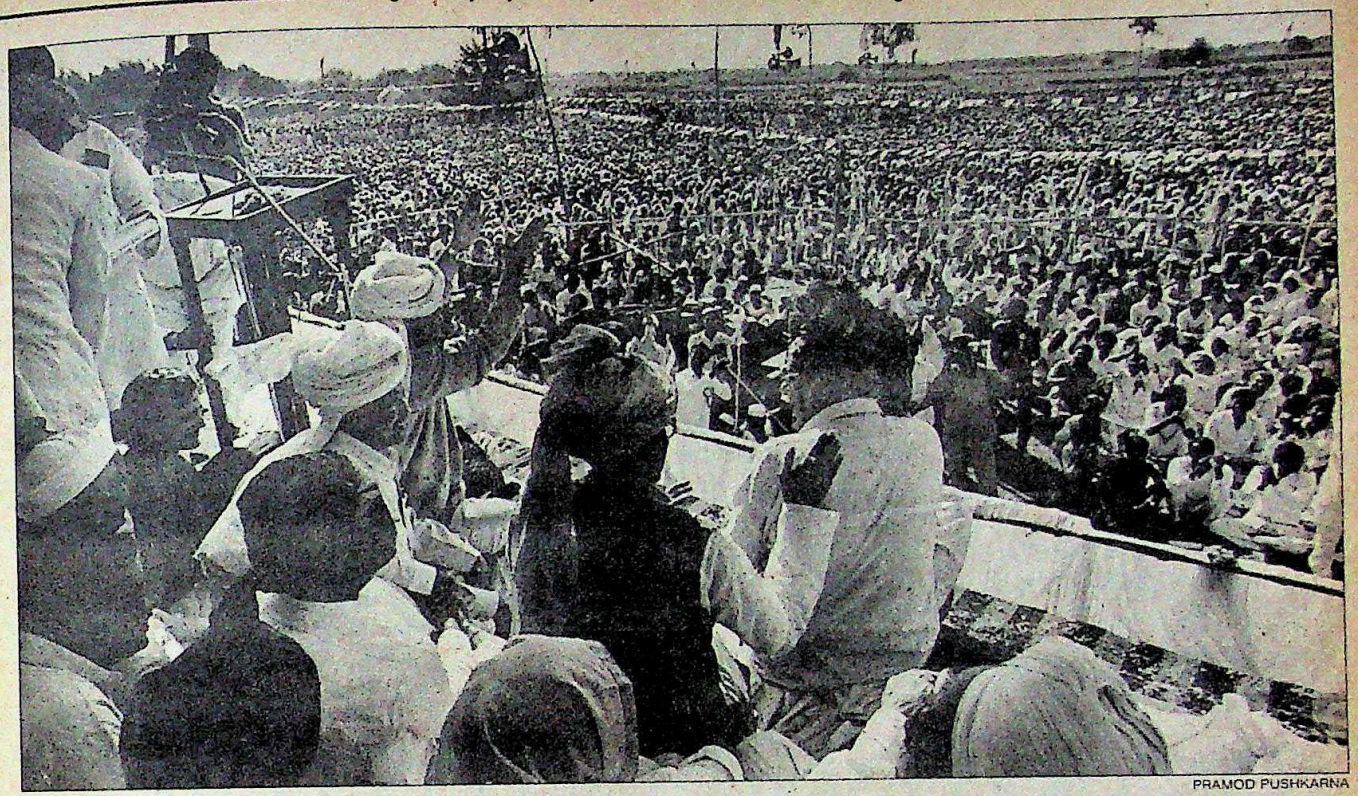

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Congress(I) leaders at a Gujjar farmers' rally in Haryana: aggressive tactics

seeds on a priority basis from now on.

As part of the overall strategy, Rajiv Gandhi has now assumed the role of the great pacifier and is attempting to end feuds between party bosses through his personal intervention. He has already presided over a 45-minute truce meeting between Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh and his rival, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Motilal Vora. He is playing a similar role in talks between Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari and Union Minister for Communications Bir Bahadur Singh; between Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar and former chief minister Abdul Rehman Antulay; and between Orissa Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik and former chief minister Nandini Satpathy.

Meanwhile, the policy of political aggression in non-Congress(I)-ruled states will continue. The idea is to make sure that chief ministers who are trying to carve out national images by campaigning for the Opposition are kept locked within their states. There are now Congress(I)-inspired agitations against the N.T. Rama Rao Government in Andhra Pradesh and the E.K. Nayanar Government in Kerala, and a campaign against West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu regarding his son's involvement in shady government deals.

The Centre has also played politics with the release of development and relief funds to opposition-ruled states. The Bakreshwar power project in West Bengal and the Telugu Ganga scheme in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are examples. States like Assam and Haryana have repeatedly complained that they have not received adequate Central assistance to help them in managing the devastation wrought by floods.

THE pressure on opposition states—floods or no floods—is expected to be relentless. The Congress(I)'s most immediate target is Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal who just about wiped out Congress(I) from his state during the last assembly elections. Last fortnight, Congress(I) organised what observers described as an impressive farmers' rally in the state. The party's strategy is to exploit casteism by pitching Gujjars and other minorities against the Devi Lal Government. Union Minister of State for Surface Transport, Rajesh Pilot, who has support among the backward castes, was picked to take the battle to Haryana.

The prime minister and his advisers have now divided the party's VIP activists into two groups—the performers and the monitors. The effectiveness and activities of people like Pilot are regularly assessed by Rajiv through a group of ministers including Union Minister for Steel and Mines, M.L. Fotedar, Defence Minister K.C. Pant, Home Minister Buta Singh, Shiela Dixit, and the AICC(I) general secretaries who now function as a second-tier council of ministers within the party.

Rajiv, however, doesn't stop there. He has created around him another circle of informal advisers from the civil service who rate and assess the performance of ministers, much to the chagrin and distaste of the latter. They include Secretary to the prime minister, Serla Grewal, Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, Gopi Arora, Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, Mani Shanker Aiyer, Finance Secretary S. Venkitaramanan, Special Secretary, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and increasingly, the engaging Abid Hussain, member of the Planning Commission.

All these measures amount to a major fire-fighting exercise in which the prime minister is the chief fireman. But it can succeed only if Congress(I) workers, who have been steadily demoralised by the events of the last two years, are convinced that Rajiv can win the elections for them as he did four years ago. But so far, notwithstanding the work being done by party functionaries or prime ministerial aides, the environment of 1984, even 1985, in which Rajiv's name became synonymous with victory, remains as elusive as the Himalayan yeti.

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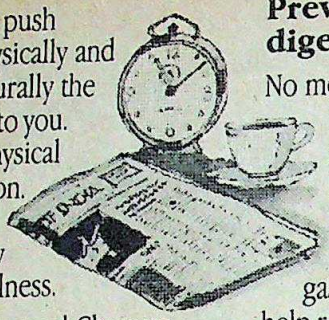

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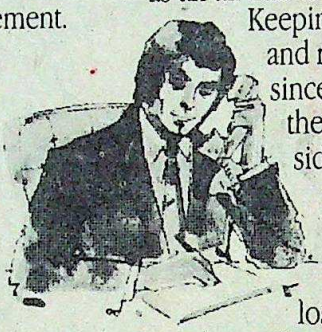

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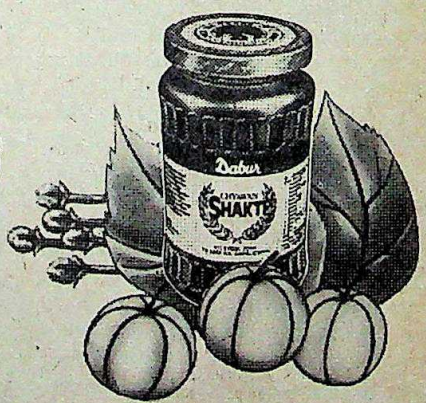

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LEFT FRONT

An Alliance Gone Sour

After more than a decade, the ruling Left Front in West Bengal is showing signs of developing cracks. Senior Correspondent KAMALJEET RATTAN sizes up the developing situation and analyses the future of the alliance in the state. His report:

Jyoti Basu is partisan. I do not know whether I can any longer continue as a minister.
—State Agriculture Minister and Forward Bloc leader Kamal Guha.

The CPI(M) wants to eliminate us in a Stalinistic manner.
—State Irrigation Minister and RSP leader Debabrata Bandopadhyay.

The administration does not listen to me, they pay more respect to the local district CPI(M) secretary.
—State Food and Civil Supplies Minister and Forward Bloc leader Nirmal Bose.

Jyoti Basu is haughty, biased and arrogant.
—State Public Works Department Minister and RSP leader Jatin Chakraborty.

What is the sense in continuing with the Left Front, if front partners behave like this?
—Left Front Chairman and CPI(M) state Secretary Saroj Mukherjee.

THE Left Front in West Bengal has always resembled one of Calcutta's trams, an antiquated system that creaks along to its destination under the weight of more passengers than it can safely handle.

By last fortnight, that allegory seemed to have acquired an added irony as the 'passengers' in the CPI(M)-led Left Front—the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP)—raised the stridency level of their growing litany of complaints against their senior partner, the CPI(M), and its leader, the septuagenarian Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu.

The cracks had been evident for some time. But now, after 11 years of its existence, the divisions in the Left Front are out in the open and the portents are ominous. More alarming is the real cause of the new defiance on the part of the front's junior constituents—the decline in the stature of Basu himself.

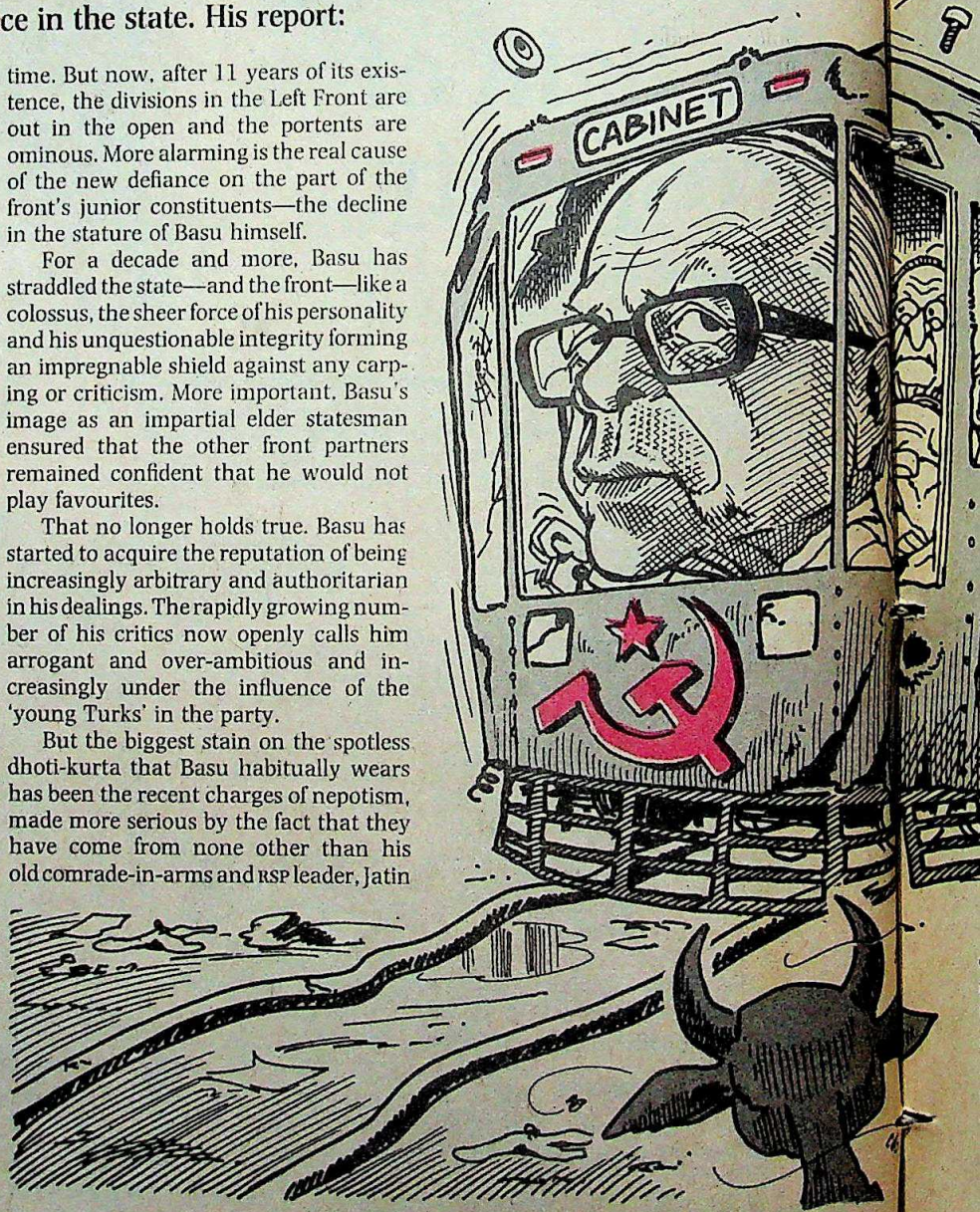
For a decade and more, Basu has straddled the state—and the front—like a colossus, the sheer force of his personality and his unquestionable integrity forming an impregnable shield against any carping or criticism. More important, Basu's image as an impartial elder statesman ensured that the other front partners remained confident that he would not play favourites.

That no longer holds true. Basu has started to acquire the reputation of being increasingly arbitrary and authoritarian in his dealings. The rapidly growing number of his critics now openly calls him arrogant and over-ambitious and increasingly under the influence of the 'young Turks' in the party.

But the biggest stain on the spotless dhoti-kurta that Basu habitually wears has been the recent charges of nepotism, made more serious by the fact that they have come from none other than his old comrade-in-arms and RSP leader, Jatin Chakraborty. 77.

The charge against Basu—that he tried to promote the business interests of his son, Chandan Basu—sent shock waves through the entire state, mainly because the one quality that has endeared millions of Bengalis to Basu has been his scrupulous honesty. Thus, when Chakraborty produced documentary evidence to prove that Basu had promoted his son's interests by insisting on bulk orders for flourescent tubes from Bengal Lamps Works Ltd, where Chandan worked till 1979, the effect was electric.

An infuriated Basu called Chakraborty a 'liar' asserting that he never asked the latter to show any special preference to Bengal Lamp Works Ltd or his son. But



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Chakraborty stuck to his guns.

What was worse for Basu, and the front, was the timing. With the junior partners in the front already in vocal revolt, the latest scandal brought the internal battle out into the open.

What further sullied the chief minister's image was further charges that Chakraborty's phones were being tapped. Chakraborty's Secretary, S.M. Murshed, had ordered a Vigilance Department inquiry to find out who had tapped the phone of his minister. Murshed was immediately transferred to a less important post outside the state secretariat.

meeting, Nikhil Das, retorted: "We do not fear you."

The defiance is nothing new. It has been obvious for some months that the junior partners of the front, particularly the RSP and Forward Bloc, have begun to feel that they have increasingly been sidelined by the CPI(M). Though the CPI(M)'s strength has grown over the years, it has been mainly at the cost of the RSP and the Forward Bloc and not the Congress(I) whose electoral support has stayed at around 42 per cent.

Till now, the junior front partners have muted their criticism because opting out of the front would have meant electoral suicide. The only workable strategy was to undermine Basu. Such a strategy, they know, would not only attract public-

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

However, the immediate fall-out of the controversy has been an extreme hardening of attitudes within the Left Front. Basu, stung by the recent criticism, even ridiculed Left Front Chairman, Saroj Mukherjee, when he was presiding over the first front meeting after the controversy broke out. In an unusual burst of petulance, Basu stormed: "What kind of a chairman are you? No one listens to you." At which, the RSP representative at the

ity but also put pressure on the CPI(M) to be more charitable towards them.

The feeling among the junior partners that they were being sidelined arose after the 1987 assembly elections when important portfolios like commerce and industry, higher education and housing which were in their hands, were taken away.

But the real crunch came in February this year at the time of panchayat elections when Basu publicly accused them of violating the panchayat seat distribution formula and went on to urge the electorate to defeat RSP and Forward Bloc nominees at all disputed seats. "We were shocked. How could Jyoti Basu stoop so low? We looked upon him as an objective arbitrator, an umpire. But he changed face and behaved like one of the orthodox, fanatic CPI(M) cadres," says a Forward Bloc leader.

Most leaders of the RSP and Forward Bloc, however, feel that Basu was being influenced by the young Turks in the CPI(M) like Biman Bose, Buddhadev Bhattacharya and Anil Biswas. The RSP and Forward Bloc were encouraged in their dissidence by the fact that they managed to win more seats in the panchayat polls than earlier. "If we are gaining strength, that means we are a vibrant party. Nobody has stopped the other partners from increasing their strength," argues CPI(M) stalwart and central committee member Biman Bose.

What has in fact been disturbing for the junior partners is the CPI(M)'s concerted efforts to eliminate them at the grassroots level. Laments a Forward Bloc leader: "We were in a majority in the first panchayat election of '78 in Cooch Behar district but by the next panchayat election in '83, the CPI(M) reduced us to a minority." All the junior front partners feel that there should be a system for allocation of zilla parishad chairmanship to at least major constituents like RSP and the Forward Bloc.

A further addition to their list of grievances was their resentment at being left out from discussions on the solution to the Gorkhaland problem. "We were kept in the dark but the copy of the Hill Development Council was handed over to a daily by someone against whom the CPI(M) leadership took no action," complained a RSP leader.

The Forward Bloc leadership has also criticised the CPI(M) for wooing the police by providing subsidised rations to them and not extending the same facilities to landless labourers. The normally subdued CPI has also joined the RSP and the Forward Bloc in criticising the CPI(M)'s resorting to populist programmes like making school education free up to higher secondary level. "Indirectly the CPI(M) helped the elite because it led to a spurt of new English medium schools which charge huge fees," said a CPI leader.

State AITUC chief and veteran trade unionist Bhabani Roy Chaudhury was most forthright: "In 11 years we have failed to meet the aspirations of the common man, of the farmers and workers, of having a social change." But what the CPI objects to most is the use of administra-

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tion, including police, by the CPI(M) to increase its strength.

Saptahik Kalantar, the weekly Bangla organ of the CPI, dated September 24 stated: "The biggest party of the front is favoured by the bureaucrats most nowadays. The workers and the leaders of the party pride themselves on this huge power. They not only look down upon other partners of the front but also want these partners to remain perpetually weak."

CPI MP Narayan Choubey recently accused the CPI(M) of taking the help of "wagon-breakers and antisocials" to eliminate the CPI in Kharagpur town and other areas of Midnapore district where his party has a dominating presence. In fact, murderous attacks on Narayan Choubey's son, Gautam Choubey, resulted in his wife, Gauri Choubey, resigning from the CPI and joining the Congress(I). Says Gauri Choubey: "I asked even my husband to resign from the CPI because what is the point of being in a party whose partner is determined to eliminate you."

The more visible cracks in the front alliance have been the bloody clashes among its constituents. Police sources refuse to furnish statistics but maintain that many people have died in the past two years during clashes among CPI(M), RSP and Forward Bloc supporters. Most of the clashes have been reported from West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Murshidabad and Midnapore districts where the RSP, Forward Bloc and CPI have a strong presence.

The junior partners also accused the CPI(M) of eroding their frontal organisations through the help of the administration. State Jails Minister and RSP leader, Biswanath Chowdhuri, accused the CPI(M) of forming a parallel jail employees association only to eliminate the RSP jail employees association. Says RSP leader and State Irrigation Minister, Debabrata Bandopadhyay: "The CPI(M)'s highhandedness and big brotherly attitude are ruining the front."

The real roots of the restlessness among the junior partners, ironically, is the one major success the state Government has achieved in the last 11 years—the successful implementation of two programmes: Operation Barga and Panchayati Raj.

For, with the success of these two programmes, the power base in the districts has effectively come under the control of the local CPI(M) cadres. Since all the zilla parishads in the state are controlled by CPI(M) leaders, they have become more powerful than ever before.

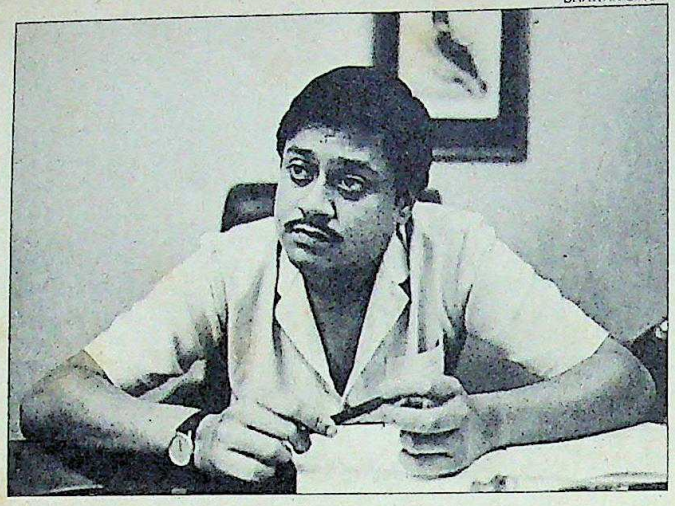
Conservative estimates put the total development funds injected into the rural areas by the Panchayati Raj at over Rs 1,000 crore a year. All developmental projects relating to agriculture, irrigation, infrastructure development, public health engineering and even funds for central programmes like NREP, IRDP and others are controlled by the zilla parishad chiefs. Since all zilla parishad chairmen in the state are CPI(M) leaders, this huge fund is controlled by them.

This has caused growing resentment because CPI(M) leaders have deliberately kept members of minor parties away from control over funds. The result has been that the common people are attracted to CPI(M) rather than the junior partners who cannot offer them anything comparable. Forward Bloc and RSP leaders have claimed that control over massive funds has led to rampant corruption within the CPI(M).

The question now is whether the junior partners can maintain the pressure and force some concessions from the CPI(M) leadership or whether the current confrontation will blow over. But what is obvious is that the Left Front has reached a major turning point. Political observers in the state feel that the front may last only as long as the senior leaders of the constituents are alive and kicking.

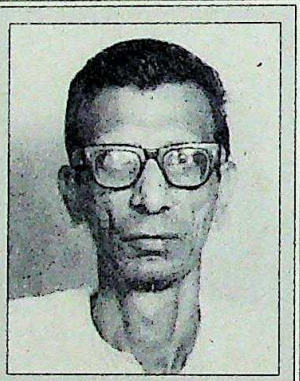
Considering that most of the stalwarts like Saroj Mukherjee, Benoy Krishna Choudhury and Jyoti Basu of the CPI(M), Makhan Paul of the RSP, Biswanath Mukherjee of CPI, and Chitta Basu of Forward Bloc are all in their late seventies, that may not leave the Left Front with much time to set its house in order.

BHAWAN SINGH



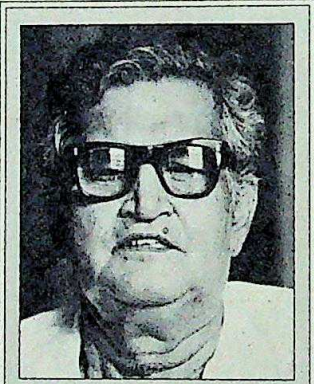
Chandan Basu: an embarrassing disclosure

Illustrations by PEALI DUTTA GUPTA



"The CPI(M) it seems is determined to eliminate us in a Stalinistic manner."

DEBABRATA BANDOPADHYAY
state irrigation minister and RSP leader



"What's the sense in continuing with the Left Front, if partners behave like this."

SAROJ MUKHERJEE
Left Front Chairman and CPI(M) state secretary

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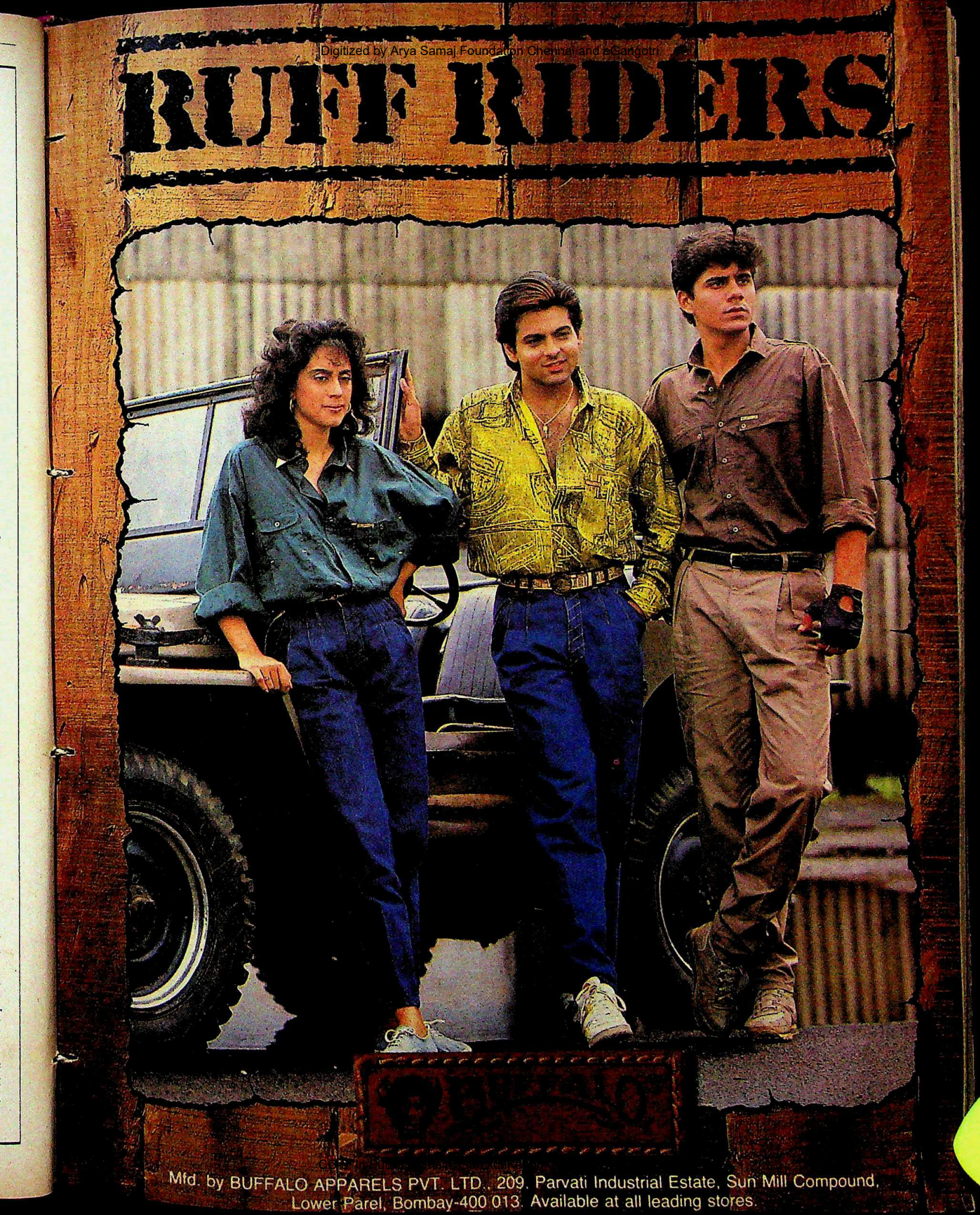

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RAJASTHAN

A Murderous Tradition

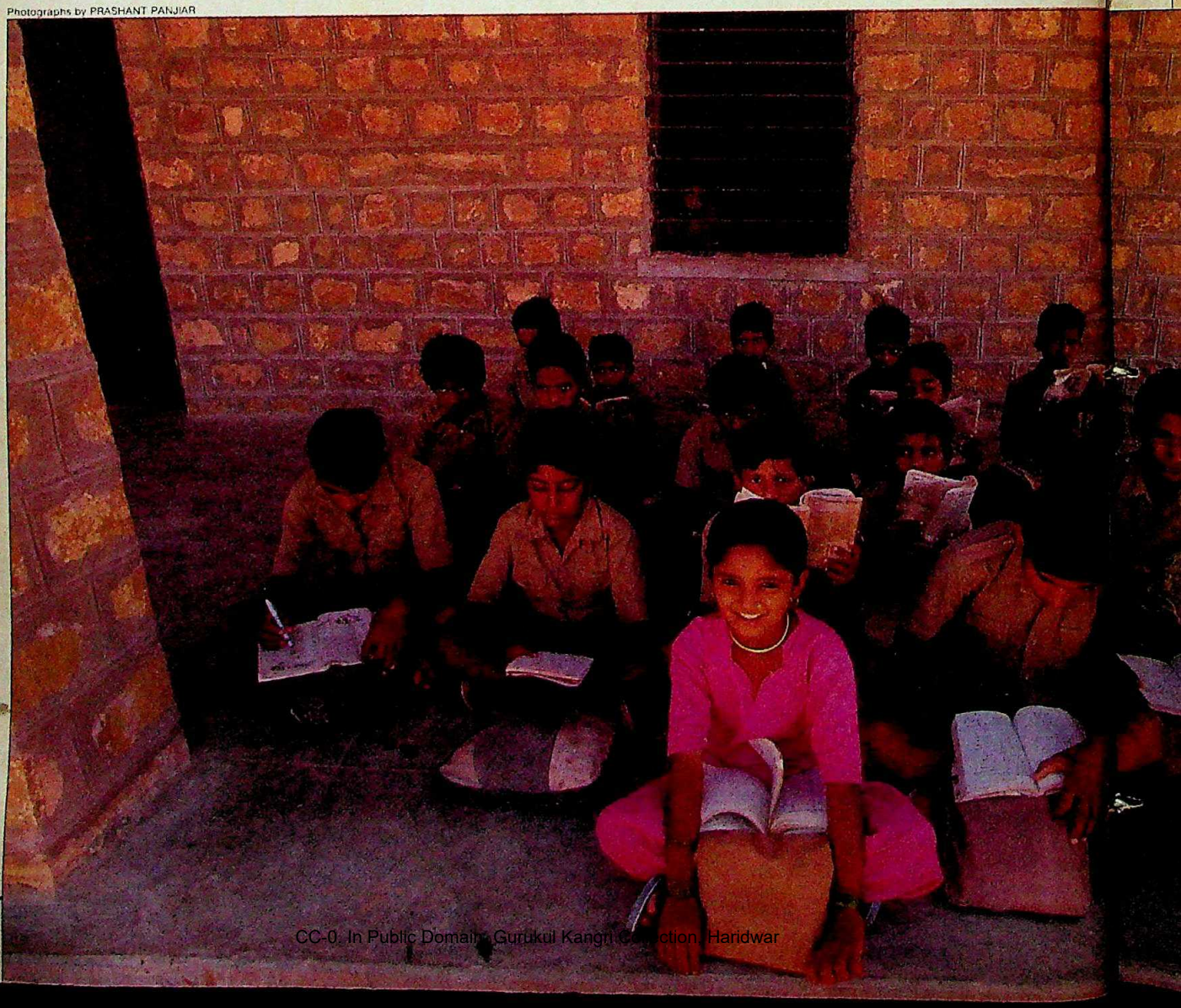
The ghastly topic of organised female infanticide in Rajasthan exploded into the open last fortnight when state opposition leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat charged that a Congress(I) legislator had indulged in the practice. Senior Correspondent PANKAJ PACHAURI travelled to a remote corner of the state to investigate if the killing of girl babies is still a widespread phenomenon. His report:

IN the heart of the merciless Thar desert, Dhapu, 81, has painstakingly earned a reputation of being the best midwife in her locality. In and around the Baiya village she is the only source of natal care with the nearest primary health centre 60 km away and the lone hospital 150 km away in Jaisalmer. There are no roads, but her fame has travelled across the sand dunes in far-flung villages predominantly populated by Bhati Rajputs.

Once every fortnight she is called to help deliver a baby. The women in their colourful garb gather in the courtyard. But if the house belongs to a Bhati and the newly-born is a girl, Dhapu leaves within seconds. As she hurries out, the usual folk-songs sung on childbirths do not follow her. What follows is an abominable tradition. In her business-as-usual tone, Dhapu calls it "a bad practice". Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code calls it "culpable homicide amounting to murder".

For generations, female infants in the

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



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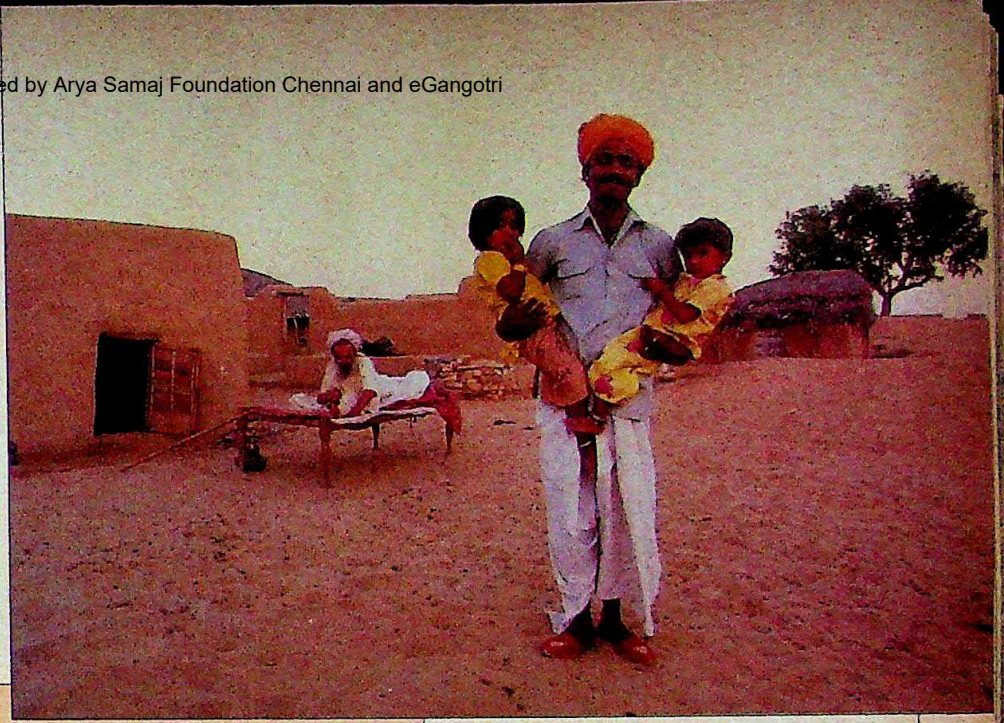
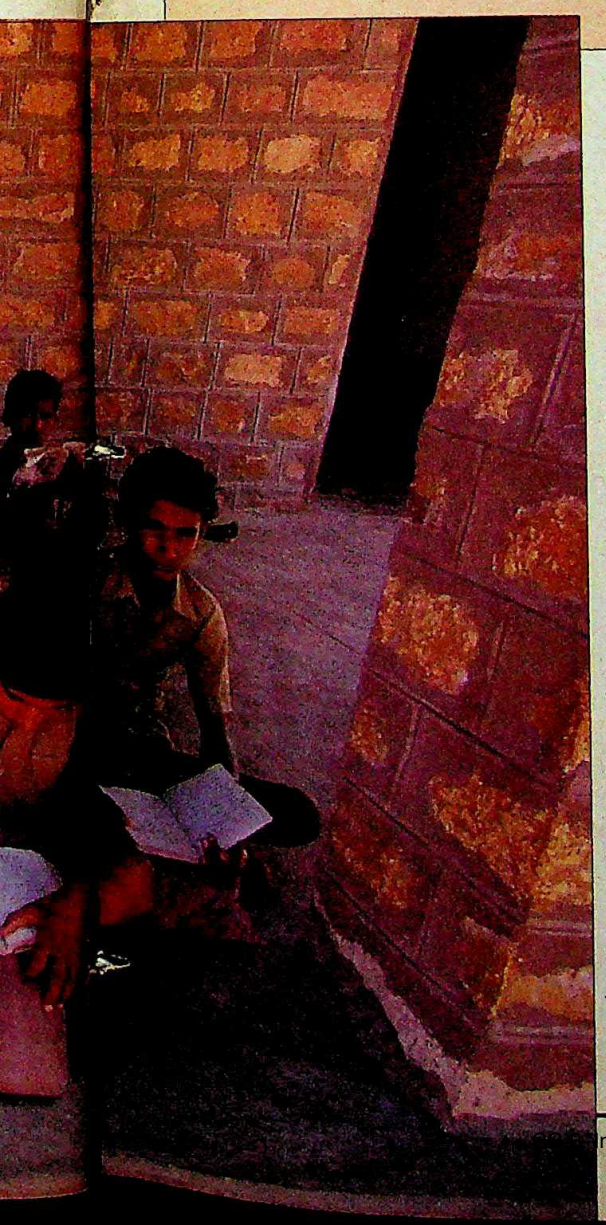
community are routinely killed before they see the light of day outside the mud hovels. The methods are as primitive as the tradition: A bagful of sand is used to suffocate the child, a heavy dose of opium does the trick in other cases or when the new-born is tough enough to resist both, she is simply strangulated. And all this is done by the mother while the other women goad her to do away with the unwanted sibling.

The result of this practice is as dramatic as it is tragic. The sex ratio in the area—which stands at 750 women to every 1000 men—is loaded against women. While the figure for the country is 938, for Rajasthan it is 919, and for Jaisalmer district which is predominantly populated by the Bhatis, it is a much lower 811. But among the Bhatis it is perhaps the lowest in the world at approximately 550, a figure which clearly hints of a practice that is taking an alarming toll.



▲ Sayar Singh, a schoolteacher in Baiya, fought the cruel practice and saved his two nieces



▼ In Deora, 9-year-old Jaywant Kanwar is one of only two girls to have escaped infanticide

THE population of Bhati girls, specifically in the cluster of a dozen-odd villages on the western border of Jaisalmer, is barely 50, while the total population is over 10,000. And all the girls are less than 10 years old, a pointer that traditions have only recently—and slowly—begun to change, and that not all Bhatis are killing their infant girls. In all these villages, people can only guess in terms of decades when the last girl of a Bhati was married. A few village elders recall recieving a *baraat* to Bhati households maybe 40, maybe 80 years ago. The rest look blank when asked when the last *baraat* and bridegroom came to their village for the wedding of a Bhati girl: they have never seen one.

Fifty kilometers of a dirt-track away from Baiya, in Deora primary school, Jaywant Kanwar, 9, is the only Bhati girl in a school which has 175 children and shares the front row with her classmates who are all boys. And a folklore is already brewing among the villagers who insist that the little Kanwar is an incarnation of a goddess. "That is why she lived, otherwise she would have also gone the way of others," the villagers said in a chorus. Her father, Panna Singh, said defensively that after he became the pradhan and went to the city, he decided to break from the murderous tradition.

In Baiya village alone, 16 cases of female infanticide during the last year were confirmed by villagers to INDIA TODAY. But rough estimates for the entire area of 12 villages put the figure of killings at more than 150 every year. And this in a state which has a new-fangled department christened 'Child, Women and Nutrition'.

The reason for this centuries-old practice is a complex mix of government neglect, ignorance, superstition, dowry demands and—above all—the false feudal pride of the Bhatis. As the former ruling clan of Jaisalmer state which was fragmented with time, the community started feeling the crunch of the tough desert life. Brothers separated from each other—and the herds of thousands of cattle-head, big pastures and gold reserves—shrank in size. What did not shrink was the Bhati pride. The elaborate marriages where gold for dowry was weighed in kilos and the guests counted in terms of villages were a thing of the past.

But the Bhatis are not the ones known for compromises. Bhopal Singh, the Jaisalmer zila pramukh traced back his community's deep-rooted psyche: "As a people, we would rather commit dacoities then beg." So opting for half-measures was out. And the desire to outdo the neighbours and other members of the clan remained. The going soon got tough. Instead of lowering their heads before others and chasing bridegrooms, the Bhatis decided to do away with the heads of their daughters, who they feared could grow up to be sources of embarrassment. Admitted the former pradhan of Deora

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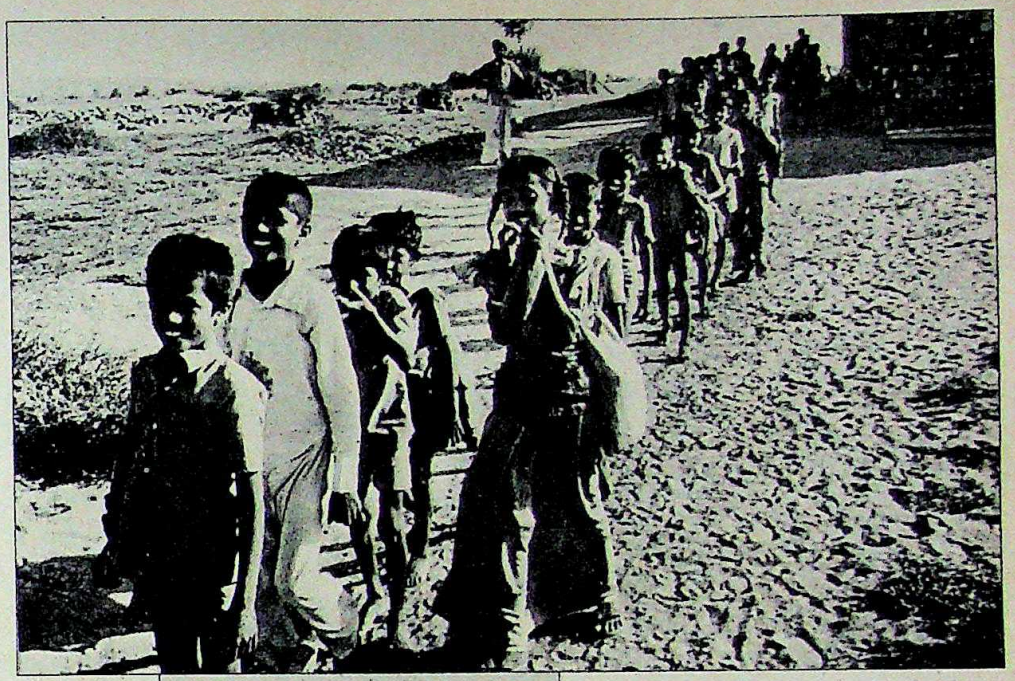
village. Chatur Singh: "We know it is not good, but who has the gold to give in dowry? That is why we are doing it."

According to Bhopal Singh, who has been pramukh for the last 24 years and represented the 2.5 lakh people of Jaisalmer in the state Assembly on the Congress(I) ticket, female infanticide was a rule about 50 years ago. But things changed quite markedly with the interaction of people with the outside world. Agreed Jait Singh of Baraura, 30 km from Jaisalmer: "Things are certainly changing rapidly now. This village had less than a dozen girls about 25 years ago. Now people are even demanding a separate school for girls".



▲ Baiya village will receive its first baraat in several decades when Pawan, 15, marries next year

But all the development schemes of the Indian welfare state have not reached this dark pocket on the western border of the district. The Government spends Rs 16.74 per capita on education annually, about the price of four plastic ball-point pens. No wonder then, that people who can read and write can be counted on an abacus. In the villages of Deora, Baiya, Jhinjhinyali, Mandha, Randha and Kunda—where female infanticide is still alive and kicking—the literacy rate is a mere 12 per cent. Out of a population of 4,901 only 15 women are educated up to the primary level.

GETTING to know the outside world is a daunting task. For two towns and as many as 522 villages, there are a mere 139 post offices and 160 letter-boxes. A mere 86 villages are electrified. There are only 529 km of pucca roads, which leaves more than 80 per cent of the population inaccessible. The District Collector, Ashok Jain, agrees that the social evil of female infanticide will be removed only with development, but resources for programmes are meagre.

Jait Singh illustrated how the practice could be curbed significantly with the introduction of one basic amenity: hospitals with maternity wards. According to the practice, the mother is provoked by the other women to do away with the girl as soon as the sex of the baby is determined. For the fear that the baby might cry and thus announce its arrival in the world to neighbours, the deed is done within minutes of delivery and later explained as a case of stillborn child. Others traditionally do not kill a baby and the mother is left to commit the crime. There have been instances where girls have lived for the fact that the mother became unconscious for hours after the birth. "If the baby girls live for a day or two in the hospital, no one will think of killing them. The taunts which can follow after the death will be too much for the Rajput pride." And while Superintendent of Police Sudhir Pratap Singh admitted that the practice was known to be widespread, he confessed that the traditions that existed in the closed community made the state machinery 'helpless'.

Another basic need—schools—has already shown its efficacy in discouraging the practice. The only villagers who talk of discontinuing the practice of female infanticide are the teachers. In Baiya for instance, Sayar Singh, 26, has already tried to organise meetings of the elders on the issue. Though success was slender, it has not shaken his faith. "The only thing I can do now is to teach them by example. I am going to keep daughters in my house, send them to school and, if possible, get them into jobs. Only then will these people understand," he said cuddling his niece, Hoshiyar Kanwar. Married six months ago, Sayar is now waiting for his first child. In school, he takes extra care to teach the only Bhati girl.

In Jhinjhinyali, Rewat Singh, 32, has taken upon himself the task of teaching the community about the evils of dowry asking them to prune their huge egos. When his sister got married in 1972 he made it a point not to exaggerate the dowry he gave. He is certain that after the people come out of their cocoons they will realise their ignorance. In his village the tradition of hosting a massive post-funeral feast for at least 1,000 people had landed many in debt-traps for generations. The practice tapered off only when they were told that the richer and educated Bhatis in the cities called only a few people for the feast. "All we need is a road and regular bus service to this village. People will go to cities and see a new world," Rewat sighs wishfully.

But that is like asking for the moon. In Baiya, the last people remember seeing a jeep was when electioneering was on for the state assembly elections three years ago. The trudge to the nearest bus stop is 20 km. And the first bus to Deora left this August when the country was celebrating the 41st year of its Independence, sending off a satellite to study weather and the capital city was plastered with posters of rock stars who were coming to perform for human rights. Rewat and Sayar are waiting for the buses so their village-mates can get on board. Away from a dark age where mothers kill their children.

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DOORDARSHAN

The Propaganda Ploy

The sudden and surprise transfer of Doordarshan Director-General Bhaskar Ghose last fortnight sent tremors through Mandi House. But the message was clear—with elections approaching, the ruling party wants closer control of the powerful medium. Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN reports.

YES, prime minister it now is. But without the humour. The sudden and unceremonious booting out of Bhaskar Ghose from Doordarshan last fortnight indicates that as far as the official media are concerned the prime minister and his men are always right. Particularly in an election year.

Ghose's transfer on October 3 sent angry ripples through the press, with edit after edit seeing the move as the end of the brief era of *glasnost* on the small screen. The unseemly haste with which Ghose was transferred also sent shock waves through Mandi House and the bureaucracy. But what was missed in all the hullabaloo of the exit is the fact that, Ghose was not really moved for what he had done or undone—but for what the Government in these hard, realpolitik times now wants done. This is the era of the three P's: populism, propaganda and public relations. Television is the ideal image-making machine. And propaganda and populism are the twin bills in Doordarshan's new programming.

It might not quite be Krishi Darshan all the way. But the patting-your-own-back of the Films Division documentaries of the '60s will undoubtedly return to the small screen. The public sector will make a come-back from oblivion—albeit, more glamorous and glitzy with all the state of art wizardry Doordarshan now has *(see box)*. "The Government's achievements have to be projected," says Krishna Kumar, minister of state for I&B, "we have to show the great strides the country has made in the last 40 years."

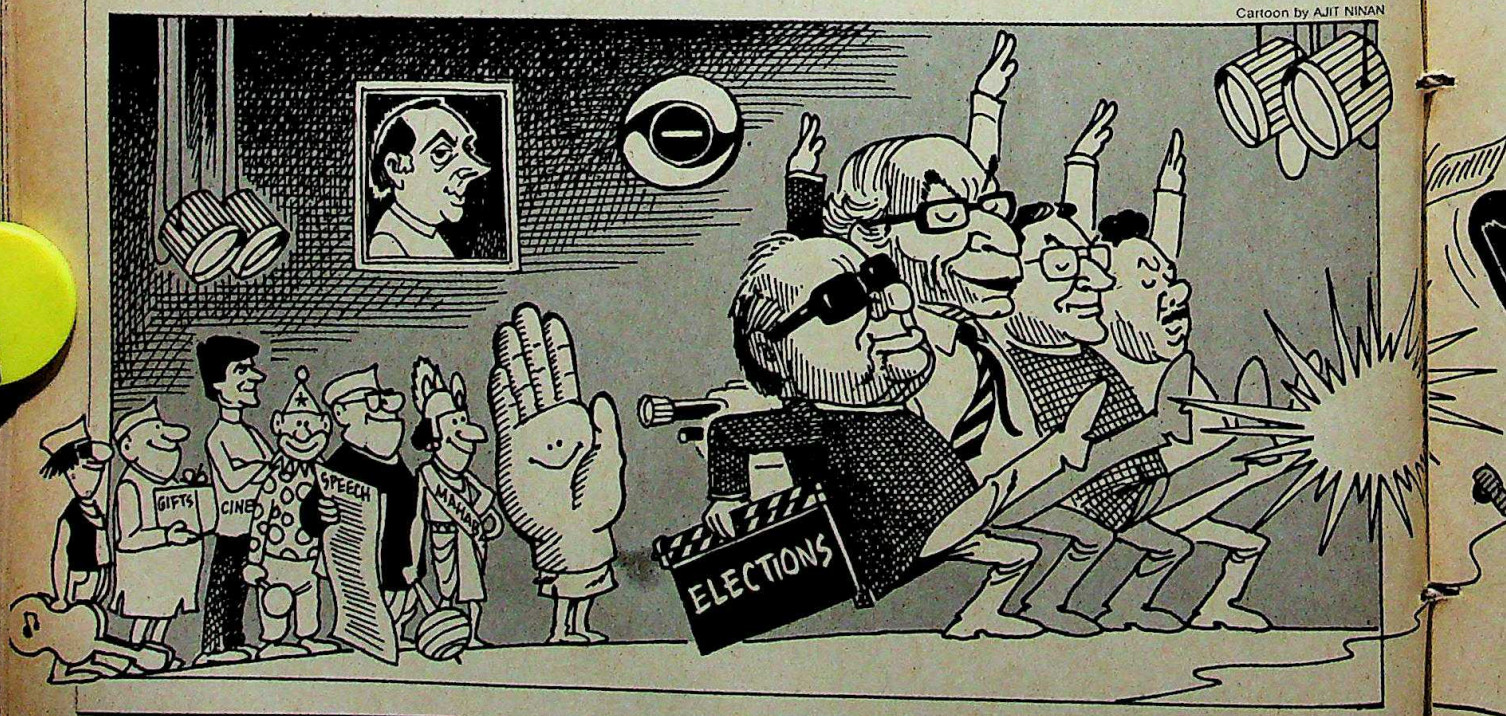
There will now be larger roles for the ministers on the small screen. Already ministerial faces are making their presence felt in newscasts. And there has been more of the prime minister than usual.

Religion having been proved the best seller of all times with the phenomenal success of *Ramayan*, the Government has advanced the telecast of B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata*. The nation gets another epic serial—the new opiate of the masses.

Turning their back a bit on the urban viewers, the hidden persuaders will also now pay more attention to rural India, which they believe is beginning to feel alienated—and where a majority of the votes lie. I & B Minister H.K.L. Bhagat told INDIA TODAY: "Basically Indian media should come closer to the people. Indian television has to be *Indian* television. And I see no contradiction between message and popularity."

Hence, the recent announcement of two Hindi films a week. On the menu as well are more situation comedies and

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



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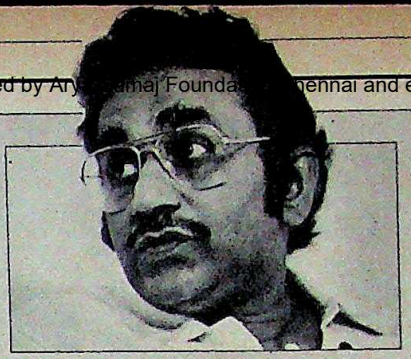

KRISHNA KUMAR

"Criticism won't be blacked out"

KRISHNA Kumar, minister of state in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting believes that television in India has to highlight India's achievements. Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN *spoke to him last fortnight. Excerpts:*

Q. *What is the role of* TV *in your eyes?*

A. I believe that TV in India has to generate pride in being Indian. We have to emphasise the values of national freedom, unity, secularism, planned economy and development. We must show the great strides the nation has been making in the last 40 years instead of self-flagellating ourselves.

Q. *What about the bad news?*

A. The Government's achievements have to be projected. This is the legitimate work of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. It is also our legitimate duty to rebut unjust criticism of the Government.

Q. *Will the criticism then get a chance to be aired at all?*

A. Criticism will not be blacked out. There will be scope but the Government has the right to rebut it.

Q. *Aren't the Government's achievements highlighted enough?*

A. Not sufficiently. There is agricultural production, research. We should emphasise the public sector, the modernisation of our armed forces and anti-poverty programmes.

Q. *There are apprehensions that the Glasnost will now be snuffed out.*

A. We have not made any changes in policy.

Q. *But one suddenly sees more and more of the prime minister and his ministers on* TV*?*

A. The prime minister is the Government's chief executive and supreme leader in policy-making. Policies as communicated by him are of news value.

Q. *What about the ministers?*

A. The ministers are shown when they are performing policies or participating in nation-building events.

Q. *But seminars are not news?*

A. We cannot avoid showing such matters. The focus is on the event and not on the personalities.

Q. *Very often all a minister is doing is inaugurating some event.*

A. If it is part of the development process then it has to be shown.

Q. *A few years ago there was talk of autonomy for Doordarshan. Is all such talk irrelevant now?*

A. Mandi House has sufficient autonomy. A large amount of power is delegated to the director.

jazzed up musical programmes. The election count-down has begun and the Government wants to make sure that it has both hands on the steering-wheel of the amorphous Doordarshan. Missing perhaps will be the spice which had in the last few months begun to tickle the palate.

But then the brief breezes of change, which many have christened *glasnost*, blew from Shastri Bhavan and rarely from Mandi House. They were often turned off there too. A producer involved with some of the current affairs programmes is surprised that Ghose is being blamed for the openness of these programmes. "I can't understand the fuss. Everything was cleared by Gopi Arora. Shastri Bhavan used to call us directly."

Mediastorm's controversial programme on sati in which P. Chidambaram, minister of state for home looked visibly cornered and uncomfortable got the green signal from the I&B secretary. The current affairs programmes this year on Bofors, opposition unity, Tamil Nadu after MGR, the Gorkha National Liberation Front agitation, cholera in Delhi and the Defamation Bill were also cleared by the ministry.

Credibility, obviously, was what the Government media-mandarins were after. But credibility could not only wear a Congress(I) face. When the focus on opposition unity was telecast, there was an outcry amongst angry Congressmen. Says a surprised Mandi House *habitue*: "For the first time there was credibility on television. It was not just *glasnost*, but restructuring. There actually were the faces of Chandra Shekhar, Advani. They had never been there before."

Why did Ghose have to go so suddenly and in this way? The signals were there for two months. Sources close to Ghose believe that the Allahabad elections and the formation of the National Front are the watersheds in the U-turn. In August there were fireworks in the council of ministers meeting. Former I & B minister, Ajit Panja, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and a few other ministers came down on Ghose. On September 1 a ministerial subcommittee was formed to look into Doordarshan.

A catalyst for Ghose's fall from grace is the prime minister's announcement dropping the controversial Defamation Bill on September 4, which interrupted an Oriya film. The forum chosen for the announcement was the Seva Dal meeting to convey the fact that the party and not the Government was behind the decision. Bhagat, rushed to the Parliament Street centre of Doordarshan and asked a technician, "to stop everything and put the recording on air". But accidentally, 14 minutes of the video were erased: what the TV viewers all over the country saw was Rajiv Gandhi addressing a handful of topiwallah Seva Dal volunteers.

A furious Bhagat asked for a top level inquiry to identify the culprits. And during the inquiry Ghose maintained that the

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blame was not with the technicians. Another incident was during the prime minister's address at the *National Herald* silver jubilee when slogans against the Defamation Bill nearly drowned out his voice. Apparently, the camera crew had been asked to record the slogan-shouting. The prime minister's remarks were intended as repartee to those slogans. But the Doordarshan men not being in the game plan bungled.

Clearly, the image makers believe that increased hardware and hard sell are, in election time, the need of the hour. The hidden persuaders are pleased. The reach of Doordarshan will soon extend to over 85 per cent of the country. Moreover, as before, they have the right man for the job. Bhagat was also the I&B minister in 1984, the year in which with Sten gun rapidity transmitters dotted the country. There are now 260 transmitters. By the end of the Seventh Five Year Plan there will be 420. And by the time the elections come around, the medium will be the Congress(I) message.

TECHNOLOGY

The Art of the State

FIRST the painted toes, tapping furiously. Next, the flying eyebrows. A second later the perfect-bow mouth. The screen fills up with three squares, each with its moving images. Kathak, enticing as a movable jigsaw puzzle. Doordarshan need no longer be dowdy. Or square. The magnificent machines have arrived, and are in Doordarshan's Rs 50 crore Central Production Centre in New Delhi's Siri Fort village.

Like a wand they can transform the most drab content into Cinderellas of entertainment. The centre, headed by Gopal Saxena, is still awaiting the repeatedly postponed inauguration: that official breath of life. But interesting things have already begun to happen here, far away from the intrigue-filled corridors of Mandi House.

Bhaskar Ghose had planned to transform Doordarshan from a clearing house to a proper house of production. Some of the producers from other centres were brought here. The centre with a staff of 120—there are 350 sanctioned posts—is already making television serials and telefilms. A telefilm based on Anton Chekov's short story, *The Grasshopper* is being shot with Alok Nath in the lead role and directed by Doordarshan producer, Saba Zaidi. During the next eight months two serials, four documentaries and two telefilms will roll out of here.

It is not the content which will differentiate these works from the regular fare Doordarshan and Bombay dish out. It is the quality. "Our equipment is state of the art high technology and can compare with many of the countries in Europe," explains Saxena. The director is happy with the machines but at pains to stress the fact that machines alone are not enough. "We have a lot to learn. There have been three workshops. It will take time for us to really get going and to produce high quality programmes."

There are two mammoth studios, each with a floor-area of about 400 square metres. Each has four professional grade full-band video cameras. But the *piece de resistance* of the centre is its ADO 2,000, which can do all the wizardry and special effects that make pop music videos what they are. "We can compress whole pictures into a dot. Images can be compressed and positioned everywhere; this is an electronic zoom. We can also do horizontal, vertical and axis rotations. There is the additional capability of perspective which can be introduced into the picture," explains S.S. Swani, of the Engineering Department.

Machine and not man dominates here. Robin Ramsey, an Australian actor whose programme based on the life and philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore is being filmed, sits in his red robe behind an elegant desk. He faces only the camera, and cameraman. The rest work invisibly. Unique in this centre are its 150 computerised lights which go up and down electrically. The control room is upstairs and everything is done with walkie-talkies. The lighting can be recorded and stored in memory. "If somebody like Amitabh Bachchan were acting in a film here and he couldn't come again for some time, we could put the lighting in memory and recall it when he returned," says a producer clearly enthusiastic about the possibilities.

New centre at Siri Fort: high-tech

Some of the other stars among the machines include the Quantel Paint-Box system for video graphics (it can do whatever an artist can do with a brush, paint, pencil and much more), a digital library system which can store electronic stills. The centre also has two post-production computerised suites for video editing.

Indian culture need no longer be presented in dull forms; the same gimmickry and shine of pop videos could package classical art to the uninitiated or unwilling. 20th century at the service of the past.

—MADHU JAIN

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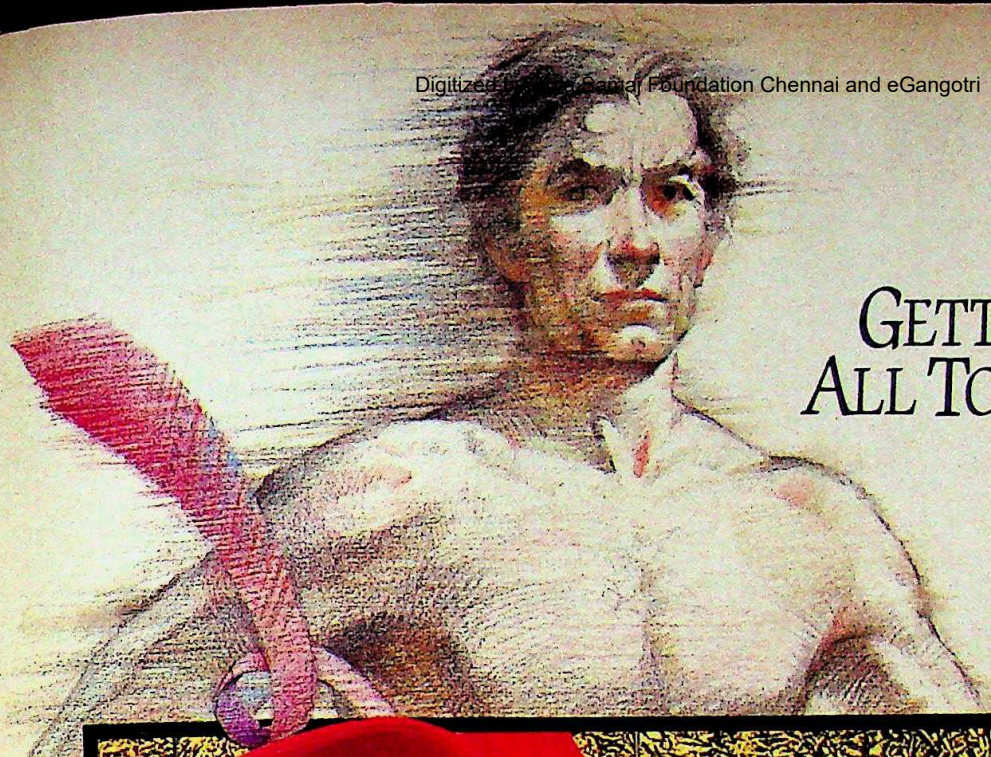

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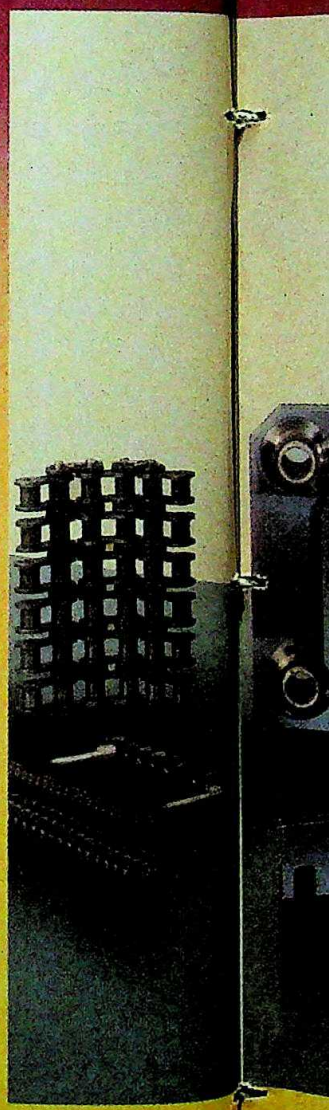

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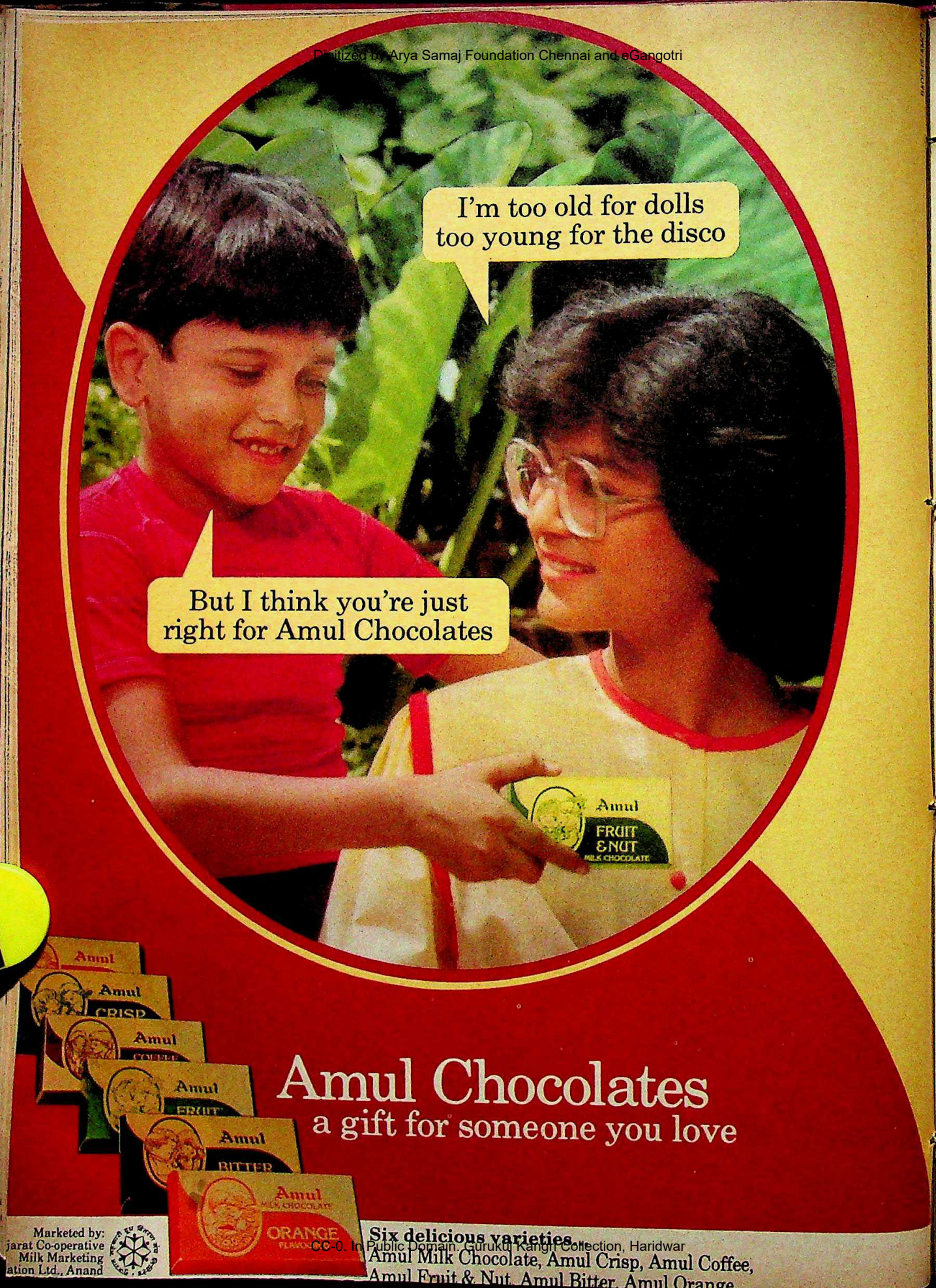

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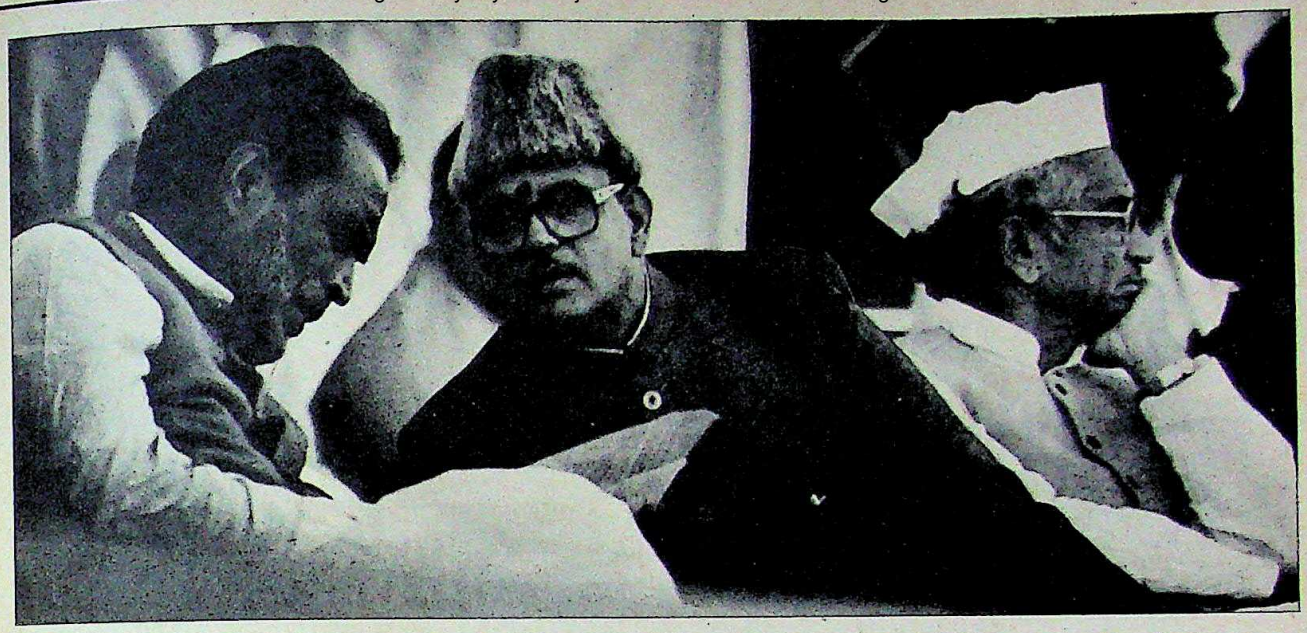

Singh flanked by Chandra Shekhar and Bahuguna: still sulking

THE OPPOSITION

Squabbling Leaders

Dissension despite V.P. Singh's peace moves

As the countdown for the much-heralded unity convention at Bangalore began, for the guiding light of the Opposition, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, the time had come to show his mettle or else fuse into the political darkness.

One day before the start of the Foundation Convention of the Samajwadi Janata Dal at Bangalore—when the Janata, Lok Dal(B), Jan Morcha and the Congress(S) were supposed to merge into one party—internecine warfare was raging furiously. To show his commitment to unity, Singh had virtually dissolved the Jan Morcha—and invited the wrath of his colleagues Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammed Khan, and Ram Dhan. Having done that, he was now under pressure to declare the formation of the new party and forge ahead. On the eve of the convention, he said: "Come what may, the country will soon have a united party. I have invited all to join us and throw out the corrupt government."

He used every trick in the book to get the squabbling leaders to fall in line. For the first time, he constituted a 17-member steering committee to finalise the merger. The biggest stumbling-blocks to unity, Lok Dal chief H.N. Bahuguna and former Janata president Chandra Shekhar, were included as members. Singh also agreed to let Chandra Shekhar head a small group that would prepare the proposed party's programmes and policies. Another committee headed by Janata President Ajit Singh was formed for finalising the constitution.

Instead of dissolving differences, these concessions led to greater confusion in the opposition ranks. Once again it was Chandra Shekhar who put a spanner in the works. He suddenly went back to his earlier stand that he was opposed to merging the Janata with any other party. He also announced that he would not attend the convention. A day earlier, his flunkies in the Yuva Janata had issued a strongly-worded statement opposing any loss of identity for the Janata Party. Rama Krishna Hegde and Orissa leader Biju Patnaik even started thinking in terms of splitting the Janata and joining the new party at Bangalore.

There was dissension in the Lok Dal (B) too. Bahuguna sulked at not being consulted by Singh on the formation of committees. And though Haryana strongman Devi Lal, flew down to Patna to attend a Lok Dal rally attended by majority of the party's MLAs and state office-bearers, all pro-Bahuguna leaders stayed away. Said Devi Lal: "Only those who feel insecure in their own areas are opposing the unity moves."

Insecurity did appear to be plaguing the Congress(S). The party postponed its decision to merge pleading for more time to study the programmes. But the real reason was that its leaders were not happy with the marginal role they were to get in the new arrangement. Singh tried to assuage such fears by arguing that in the new party, decisions would be taken on the basis of merit.

All such pleas fell on deaf ears not only in the Congress(S), but often in the Jan Morcha too. Its convenor Ram Dhan decided against attending the Bangalore convention because he too was opposed to the merger. Majority of the Morcha MPs were with Ram Dhan as none of them wanted to lose their seats—which they would have to forsake in the event of joining a new party.

As if Singh did not have enough on his hands, Bahuguna and company added another tangle to the knot when they tried to forge an alliance with the communists without involving the Jan Morcha chief. Both Bahuguna and Congress(S) leader K.P Unnikrishnan invited CPI(M) leaders to their homes.

It is precisely this kind of cloak-and-dagger intrigues that have hindered opposition unity till now. Yet Singh has managed to keep his chin up. Just before the convention he said: "I have patience. Let me exhaust all my weapons before I show my trump card." But by then the Opposition—and Singh's—popularity may have plummeted to irretrievable depths.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

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UTTAR PRADESH

Power Broker

Bir Bahadur remains a force

Last month, Chief Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari and Union Communications Minister Bir Bahadur Singh went on a tour of Gorakhpur, the latter's home town. They were accompanied by former minister Sunil Shastri—better known for having been routed by V.P. Singh at Allahabad—and Minister of State for Forest and Education Jagdambika Pal. Suddenly, the hand-grip of their convertible jeep snapped. Tiwari fell down. So did Pal and Shastri—who is still nursing his injured leg. But not Bir Bahadur Singh.

Nothing, howsoever unexpected, throws Singh off balance. Edged out of the chief ministership of Uttar Pradesh more than three months ago, he was brought to New Delhi and given charge of the Union Communications Ministry. Yet, the hardy political survivor has continued to meddle in the affairs of his state. As Union minister, he's more often in Lucknow than in Delhi. After all, the Union Communications Ministry cannot compare with the electorally crucial state of Uttar Pradesh.

Singh seems to be one of those people to whom the grass on the other side always appears greener. When he was the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, his detractors' complaint was that he spent more time in Delhi than in Lucknow. Last month, he spent 14 days in the state and was in Lucknow nine times.

Dozens of cars—many belonging to members of Tiwari's cabinet—line the road outside Singh's Mal Avenue bungalow when he is in town. Of late, even senior state government officials have taken to visiting him. Clearly, he continues to be a powerful power centre in the state—much to Tiwari's consternation. And he goes out of his way to ensure that everyone knows it. For instance, on the eve of Tiwari's second cabinet expansion, Singh telephoned half a dozen MLAs, who had been ministers when he was in power, and informed them that they would be reinducted into the new Tiwari Ministry—thus giving the impression that he got them the ministerial berths.

Now, this grateful group of ministers are his staunch loyalists—though their leader is supposed to be Tiwari. Yet, Singh denies that he would like to upstage his successor in Uttar Pradesh: "I always come here when there's some political or official work to do. I never visit the state without work. And after all isn't this my home state?" he told INDIA TODAY.

It's precisely because of his strong feelings about his home state—particularly his home town Gorakhpur, in eastern Uttar Pradesh—that he recently threw a tantrum over the "deliberate" neglect of the eastern districts. On September 10, a senior cabinet minister known to be close to Tiwari visited Singh at his Lucknow residence just to reassure him that this wasn't the case. But before the minister could say anything, he was lambasted in front of a group of visitors: "How can you dare to maltreat my constituency and my district? I know everything and I will see to it that nobody does this." Before the hapless minister could respond, Singh strode into his house.

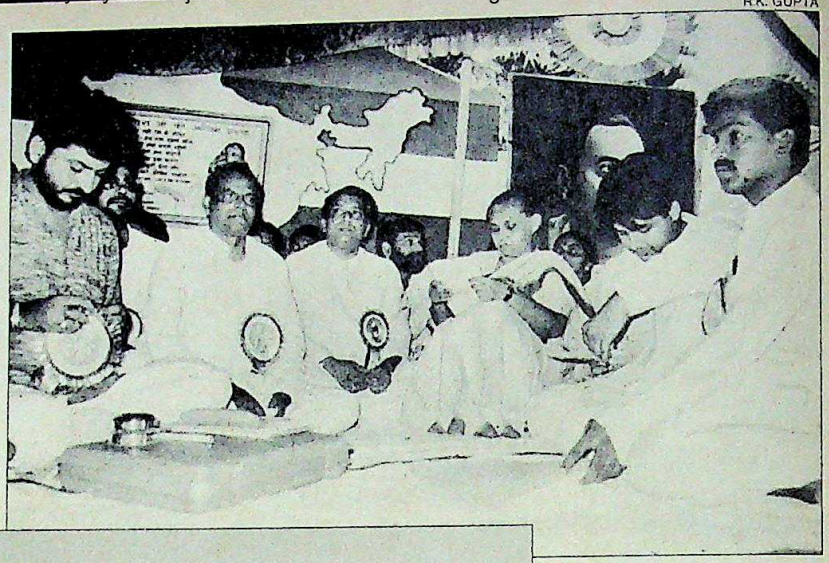
Just 10 days after this incident, instead of taking his predecessor to task for humiliating his minister, Tiwari accompanied him to Gorakhpur and reviewed development work in the district. Said one of Tiwari's cabinet colleagues: "The man (Bir Bahadur) is such that somebody as seasoned as Tiwari has to bow in at times. The chief minister doesn't want to upset him." In fact, all through the Gorakhpur visit Singh, not Tiwari, seemed to be at the controls. Once when Tiwari was about to address a meeting, a group of students started shouting: "*Sher-e-Bir Bahadur zindabad*". Tiwari kept smiling but while waiting for the slogans to die out looked distinctly helpless.

Tiwari's detached style of functioning hasn't endeared him to his supporters either. In contrast, the Union minister's durbars are gossipy and long-winded. Recently, at the end of one such session, he announced: "We will meet again soon. I will be coming again on October 1, then October 3 and then on October 6." True to his word, he was present in the state on all three days. On October 6, he even landed up at the vidhan sabha where Tiwari was presenting a list of supplementary demands and signed the MLAs' attendance register—strange actions for a Union minister.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi may have only recently instructed him not to interfere in the affairs of the state, but it looks like it will take more than the high command's diktats to keep Bir Bahadur Singh away from his first love—state politics.

—DILIP AWASTHI

R.K. GUPTA



Bir Bahadur in Lucknow: strong base

In spite of having become a Union minister Bir Bahadur Singh continues to wield considerable clout in state politics—much to Tiwari's consternation. And he makes sure that everybody knows it.

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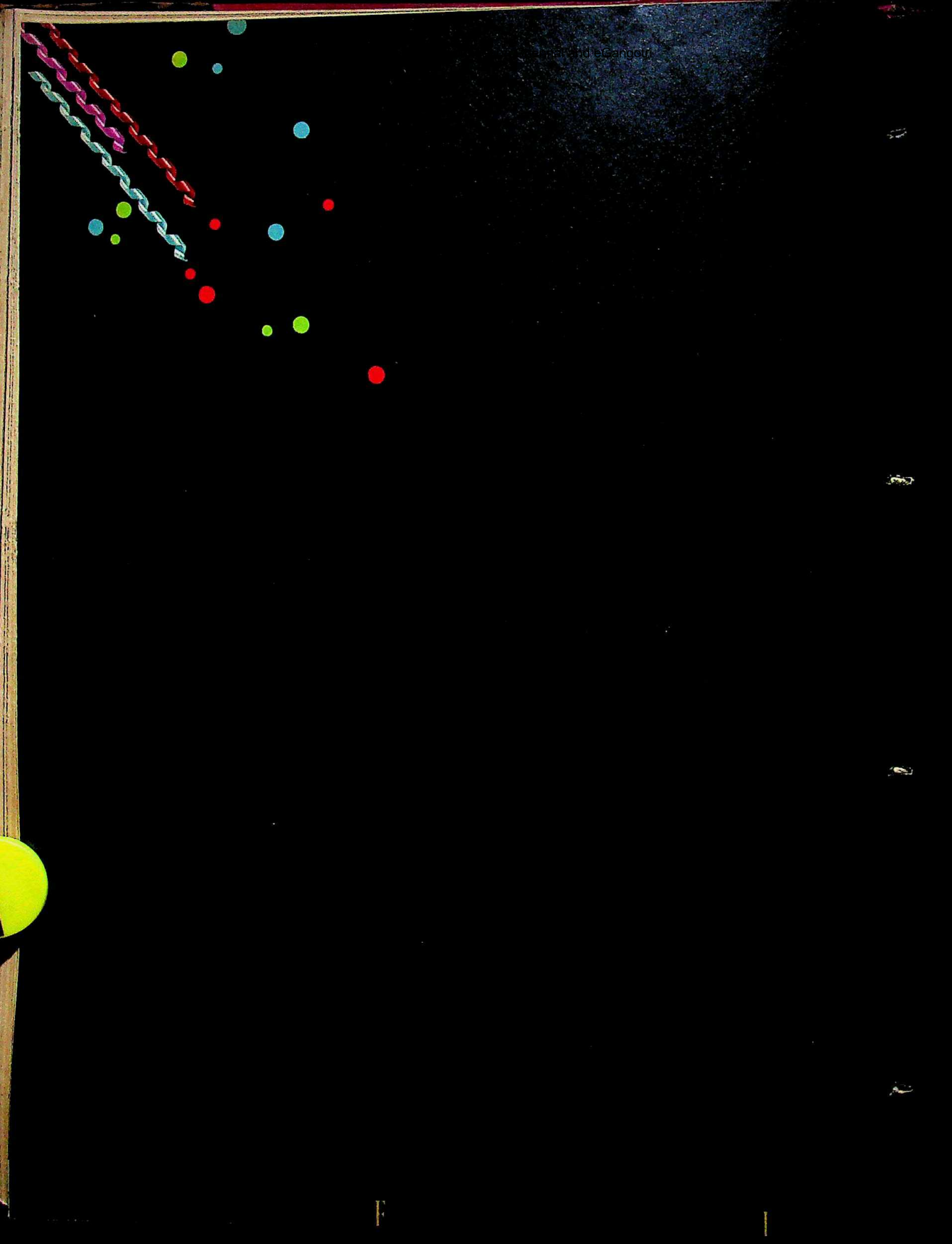

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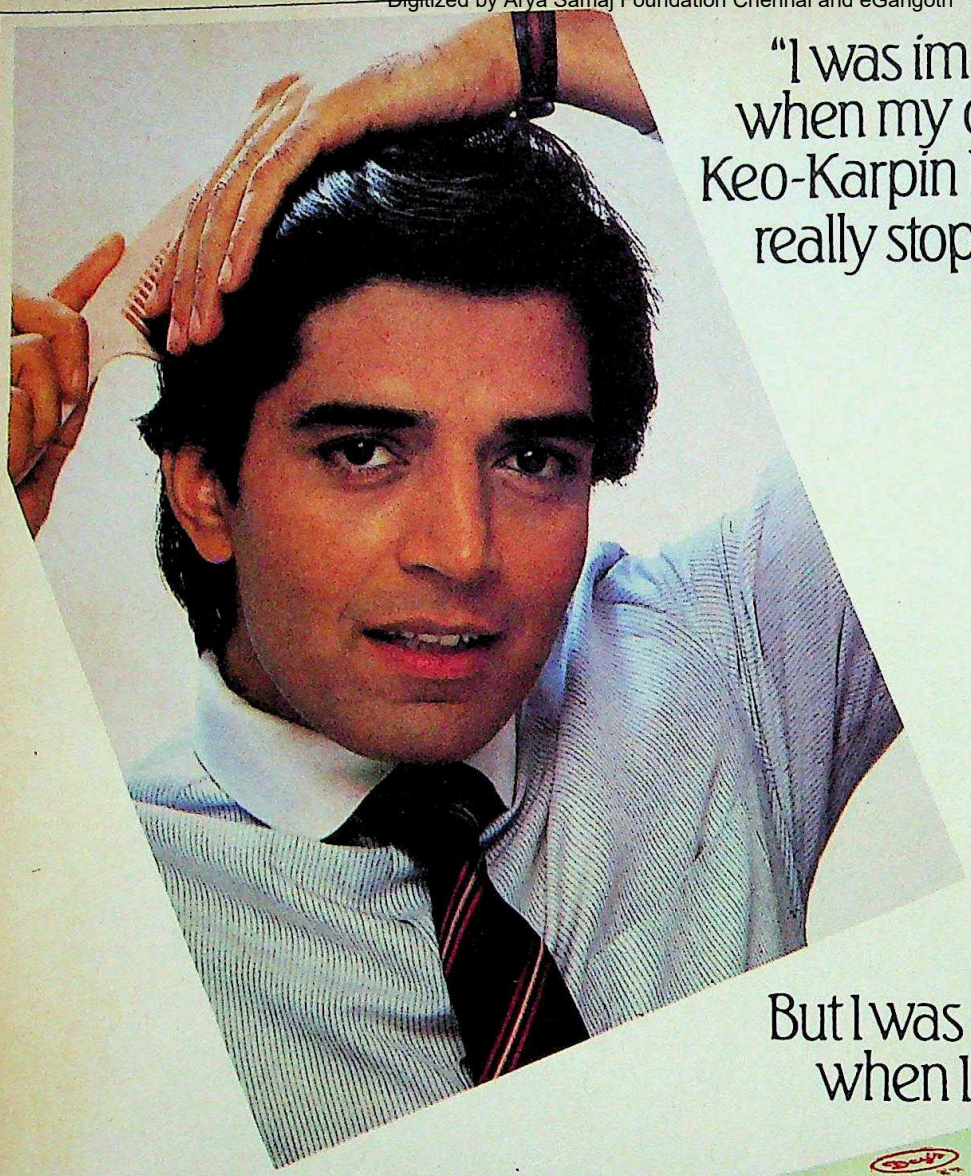

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MADHYA PRADESH

Thorny Crown

Dissidents step up activity

FORSAKEN by the Congress(I) high command, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh is finding it increasingly difficult to fight the swelling army of party dissidents. None of the familiar tricks of the master strategist seems to be working this time. Not the cabinet expansion, not the offerings of party postings and not the truce talks. "Singh's second term as chief minister is like the re-run of a flop film," says state BJP chief Sunderlal Patwa.

Last month, in an attempt to stem the tide of dissidence, Singh added 10 new names to his cabinet, two from his detractors' camp. While this failed to smother the clamour for his ouster, his opponents rallied around the latest addition to the dissident camp—Shyama Charan Shukla, twice chief minister and Singh's arch-rival. Though out of the party for a decade, Shukla still commands considerable clout, especially in Chhattisgarh, where he comes from. He was re-admitted despite stiff opposition from Singh.

But Singh's supporters see cause for cheer in the fact that the high command finally cleared the list of new ministers. Singh himself likes to believe it signifies the leadership's support for him. "I received permission for expansion although Voraji and Scindiaji did not suggest any names," he said. Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare Motilal Vora and Union Minister of State for Railways Madhavrao Scindia, the leading pair in the dissident camp, have been making forays into the state with thinly-veiled attacks against Singh. Both have now hitched their caravans to that of Shukla, their erstwhile enemy.

Shukla's re-entry is seen as a victory for the rebels. So far, Singh was able to block his return by saying he'd deserted the party during both the major splits in the Congress. Now, Shukla has become the cutting edge of the dissidents and has been given warm receptions at Raipur and Bhopal. One of the slogans raised at Bhopal was: "*Nai chetna, nai umang*, Moti, Madhav, Shyama *ke sang* (a new awakening and hope with Moti, Madhav and Shyama)." Shukla was also projected as the next chief minister.

What worries Singh even more is the attitude of the party leadership. Dissidents now find access to Rajiv easier. "The high command takes our complaints seriously," said Jaipal Singh who was dropped from the Arjun Singh Ministry. This has caused heart-burn among the loyalists. "The attempts to undermine the Government's credibility are harming party interests. It's time New Delhi realised it," said Congress(I) MLA Ramashanker Singh, a Singh supporter.

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

But at least part of the blame for fanning dissidence lies at Singh's door. When he replaced Vora, Singh was brimming with confidence and a fair amount of bile. He set out on a collision course with Vora and Scindia, uprooted their supporters from the ministry and state corporations and brought in his own men. The mass annihilation invited harsh reprisals. Vora and Scindia joined hands and, with the tacit backing of the high command, launched a campaign to run down the Government.

Now with Shukla's entry and the sharp polarisation of forces in the party, Singh has mellowed. In an attempt to placate partymen, he held talks with some 1,500 party functionaries recently. And in August, he extended olive branches to the rebels by inducting some of them, like veteran Singh-baiter Krishna Pal Singh, into various party committees. Some were accommodated in the legislature party executive.

If all this failed, the reason is that dissidents doubt Singh's intentions. Last month when Singh asked Vora and Scindia for lists of their candidates for ministerships, both refused to oblige. Scindia is reported to have said: "I've received complaints that you are running almost an opposition government. I don't want to be a party to it." That illustrates the mood in the dissidents' camp: no compromise, it's a fight to the finish.

But Singh did not try to patch up with Shukla. The feud between them is too old to be forgotten. Shukla had refused to include Singh in his cabinet. And for the last few years, Singh has been trying to weaken the stranglehold of the Shuklas—Shyama Charan and his brother and Jan Morcha leader, Vidya Charan—in Chhattisgarh. In Singh's recent cabinet expansion, half the 10 new ministers inducted were from Chhattisgarh.

Shukla, in return, has launched an attack on Singh. "Vested interests who have no faith in Congress(I) policies have made inroads into the organisation in the state, which has resulted in rampant corruption and infighting," he said. Singh retaliated, but cautiously. Some people, he said, were trying to create an impression that certain persons had a magic wand which could solve the state's problems. The reference was to the attempt to project Shukla as an alternative to Singh. Commented Vora: "Outbursts against Shukla are childish and immature."

As the war of words escalates, the attitudes on both sides of the fence are hardening. The dissidents, looking to the high command for aid, are expecting the ouster of the chief minister, while Singh still behaves as if he is the messiah. But instead of the halo, Singh has a cloud over his head.

—N.K. SINGH

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ORISSA

Broken Promises

Patnaik faces opposition in his constituency

OVER the last few years, Chief Minister J.B. Patnaik has seen most of his bastions crumble. First, growing dissidence eroded his base in the ruling Congress(I). Then, a series of scandals further sullied his image. Yet, the tenacious Patnaik has survived as chief minister for eight long years. But now the last citadel could be falling as Patnaik faces opposition from an unexpected quarter—his assembly constituency, Athgarh, in the coastal district of Cuttack, which has faithfully voted him to power with handsome majorities since 1980.

Panic buttons were pressed last fortnight as a 34-point "people's open letter" to Patnaik—listing unfulfilled promises—was circulated throughout Athgarh town. At the same time, the Athgarh Yuba Samaja, an organisation of the local youth, threatened to intensify its three-month-old anti-Patnaik agitation. The chief minister sent Industries Minister Niranjan Patnaik to Athgarh, who temporarily diffused the crisis by offering some sops to the local residents. On behalf of Patnaik, he promised to set up a tin factory, an oil extraction plant and a powerloom unit. The Yuba Samaja suspended its agitation for three months and a relieved Patnaik announced: "There is nothing wrong in my constituency. People are happy with what I have done for them."

Nothing could be further from the truth. Tempers have been running high in Athgarh for the last six months. Agitations, general strikes and demonstrations have been organised by Congress(I) workers and the local youth in protest against non-implementation of election promises. As Patnaik has repeatedly failed to be true to his word, the latest sops too are likely to be consigned to the list of broken promises:

► In 1981 Patnaik laid the foundation stone of an industrial estate at Radha-Damodarpur. Two years later, he inaugurated it. Today all the 10 sheds of the estate are closed as entrepreneurs took loans and disappeared.

► A milk-chilling plant with a daily capacity of 2,500 litres was set up in Athgarh town in 1983. Fourteen cooperative societies were supposed to supply milk to the plant. As 13 of them are now defunct, the plant is chilling just 150 litres of milk daily.

► Patnaik had promised to build an electronics complex. It was abandoned halfway through the construction.

► A blood bank added to the subdivisional hospital is barely functional today.

► The Rs-16 lakh Tailmal Minor Irrigation project was due to be completed by 1986-87. It is still incomplete. Worse, locals say funds meant for flood relief were diverted to the project.

These are only a few of the unfulfilled promises made by Patnaik and his MP wife Jayanti—Athgarh is a segment of her Cuttack Lok Sabha constituency. According to the open letter, Patnaik promised new industries worth Rs 5 crore but nothing was done; he promised to eradicate joblessness but there are 10,000 educated unemployed in the area; he promised to irrigate every inch of the land but most irrigation projects are incomplete. So dismal is the industrial scene that the one ceramics factory which existed in the area before Patnaik came to power, has also closed down.

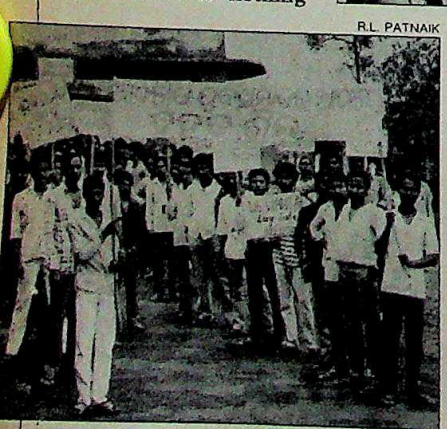
Patnaik now denies he ever made most of the promises and shifts the focus to areas where he's achieved some success—he points out that all villages in the constituency have electricity, drinking water facilities and pucca roads. "This is the reason rural people haven't participated in any anti-government agitation," he says, adding that opposition to him is restricted to Athgarh town.

His supporters claim that though Athgarh town has a population of just 12,000, it has been placed on top of the list of medium towns for the purpose of integrated development, with an allotment of Rs 1.24 crore. For good measure, they add that since 1980 a rural stadium, cold storage unit, spinning mill, cattle feed factory and sugar factory have been set up in Athgarh. Besides, each village has a fireproof school, they say.

Powerful Congress(I) dissidents in the area paint an entirely different picture. They maintain that all benefits have been cornered by people close to the chief minister. The anti-Patnaik movement is being led by a Congress(I) MLA Rasanand Sahu, who'd vacated the

R.L. PATNAIK

(Anti-clockwise from left) Patnaik; anti-Patnaik agitation; incomplete irrigation project; milk-chilling plant



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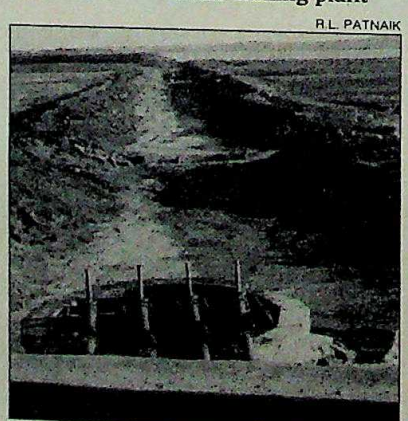

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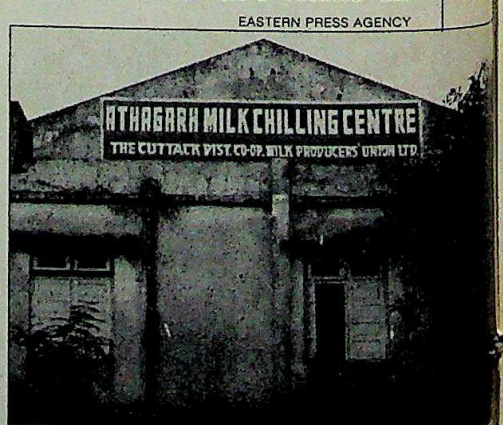

EASTERN PRESS AGENCY

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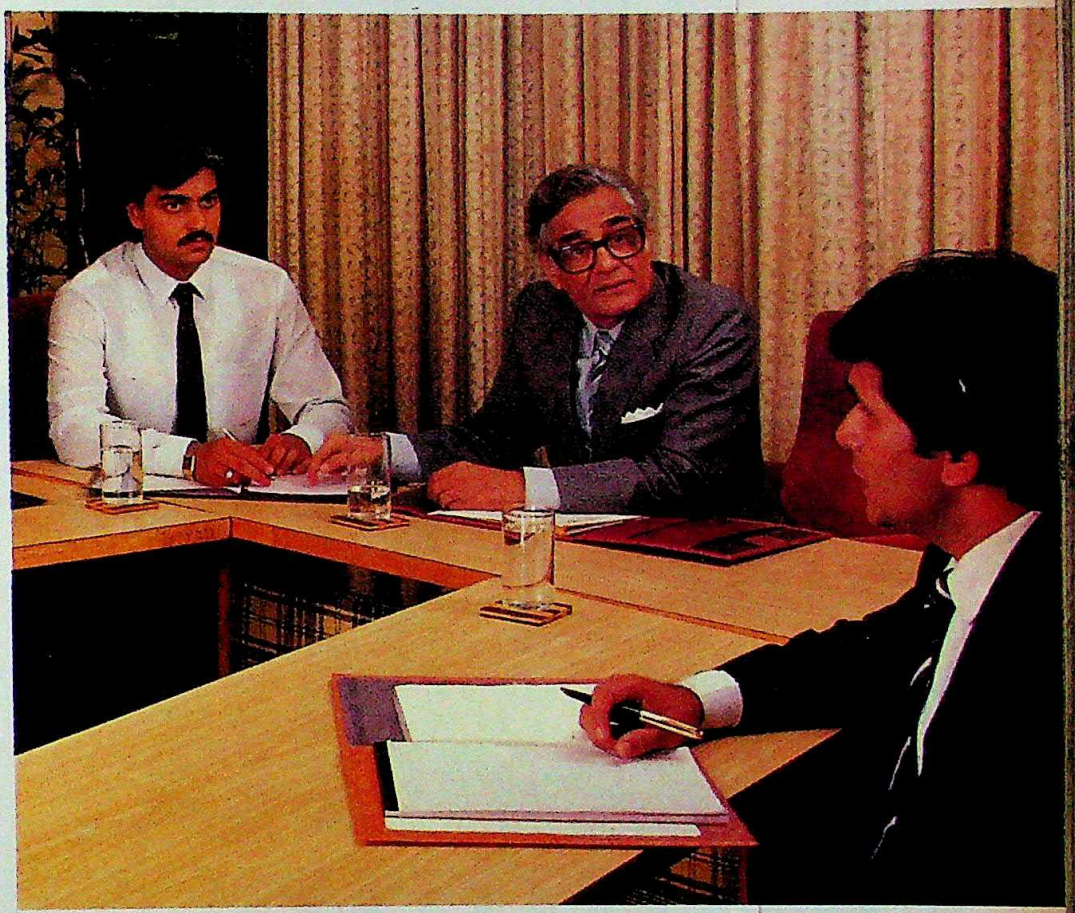
Presentations negotiations and dip, dip, dip!



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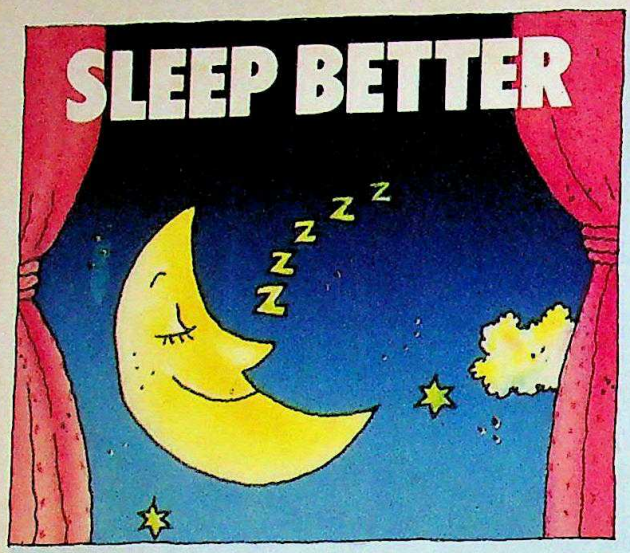

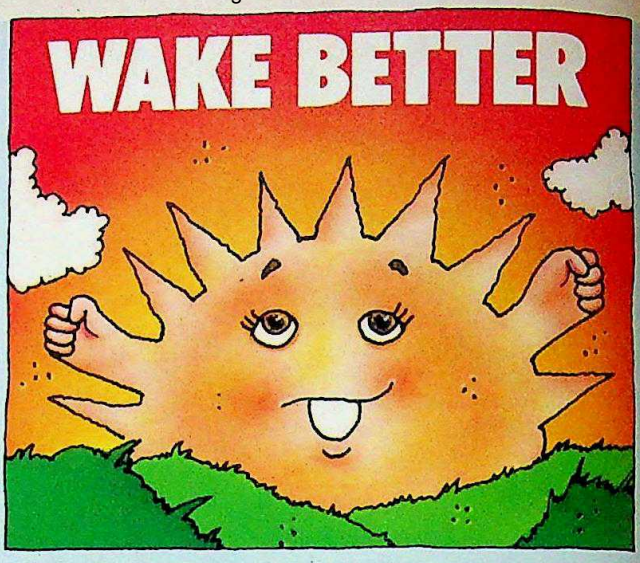

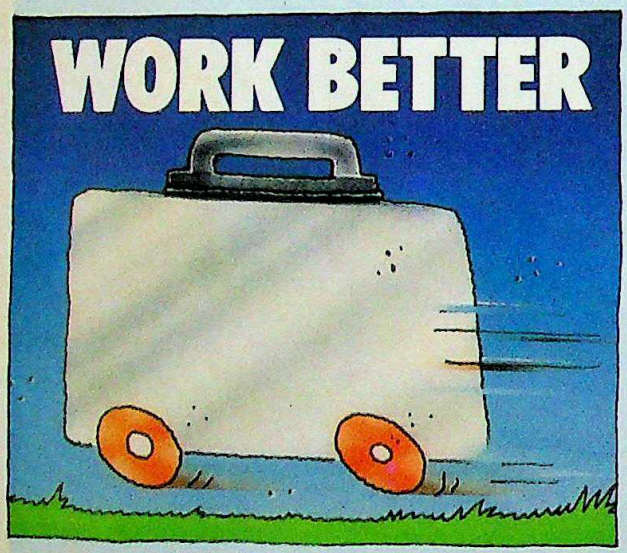

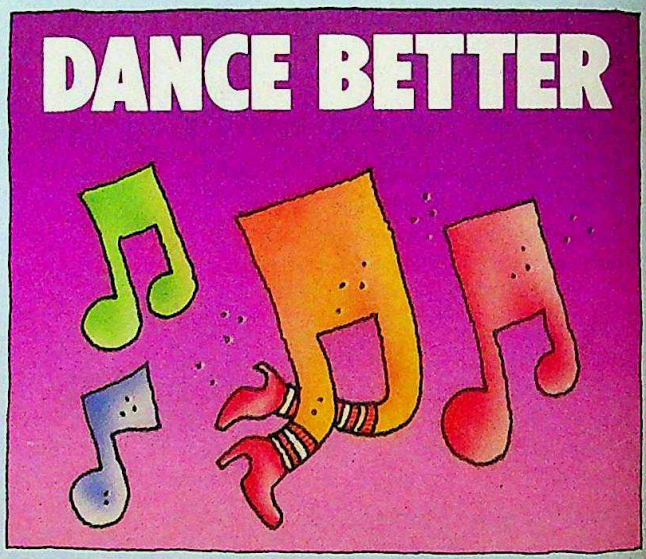

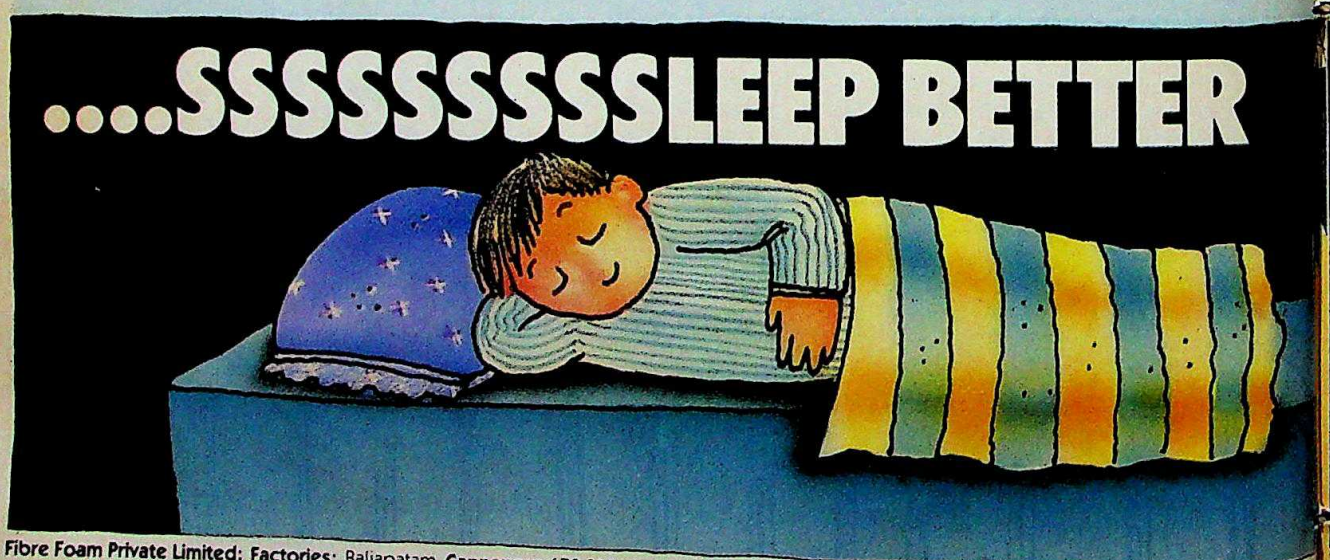

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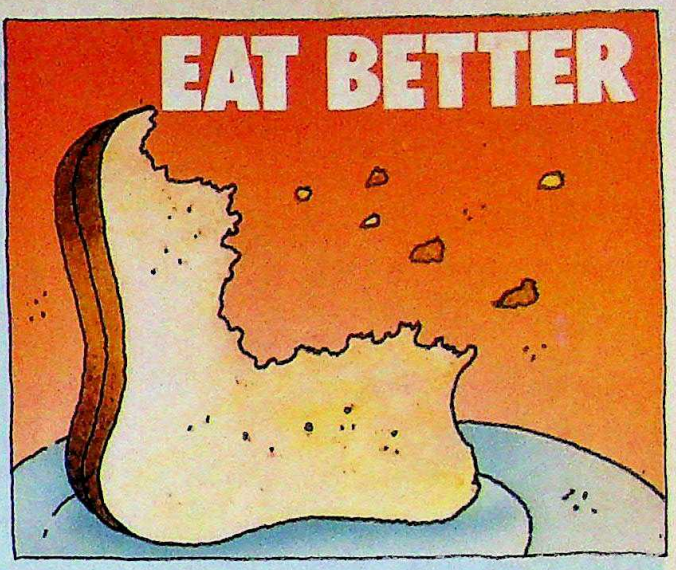

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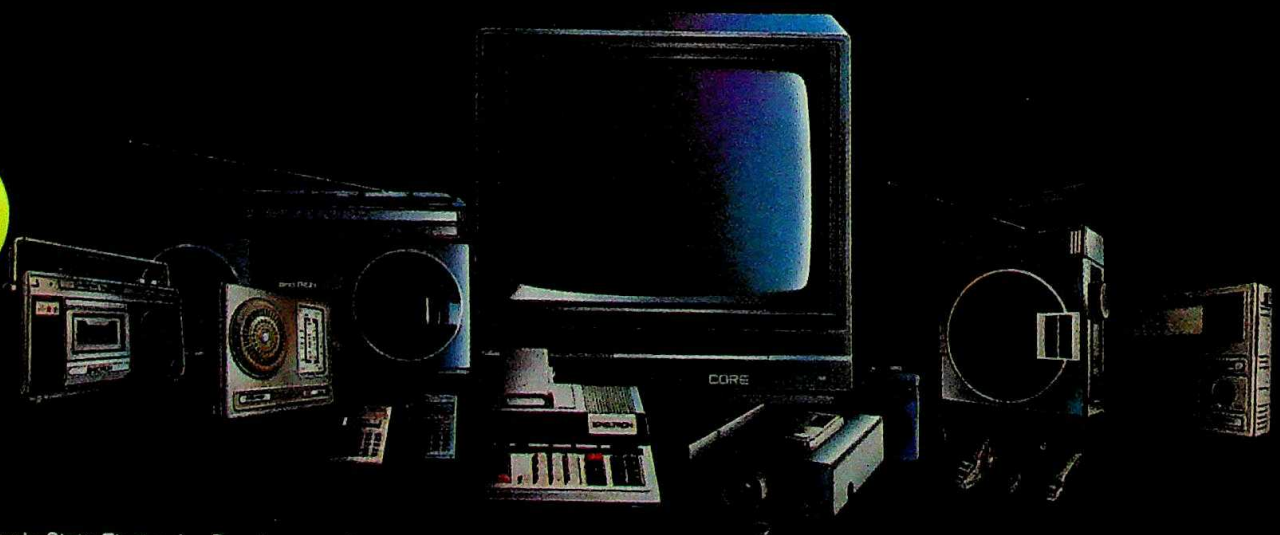

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Athgrah assembly seat in favour of the chief minister in 1980. In exchange, Sahu was made chairman of the lucrative Orissa State Road Transport Corporation. He now says: "What extra benefit have people got for electing a chief minister twice?" Patnaik's supporters counter that Sahu is sore because the corporation's chairmanship was taken away from him when he was re-elected to the Assembly in 1985.

Patnaik himself has a pat reply for every accusation hurled at him by the dissidents. To the charge that he seldom visits Athgarh, he says: "I have to care for the whole state. If I devote my entire energy to this constituency it would cause anger elsewhere but this does not mean I ignore it." Reports of widespread discontent are dismissed as untrue. "If people are unhappy, why are they voting for us so overwhelmingly?" he asks.

Part of the reason could be money power. Radhanath Rath, editor of the powerful Oriya daily *Samaj* says that just two days before the last Lok Sabha elections, Rs 1.6 lakh were distributed to ensure that Jayanti got elected. He also points out that 53 politically motivated murders have taken place in Athgarh during the last four years.

This clearly indicates that the political climate in Athgarh is extremely vitiated. More worrying for Patnaik, the anger has now spilled over to the local people. And Patnaik's strategy to still the gathering storm by offering more sops is at best a short-term solution which could boomerang on him if he fails to convert promises into reality.

—FARZAND AHMED in Athgarh

BIHAR

Talking Tough

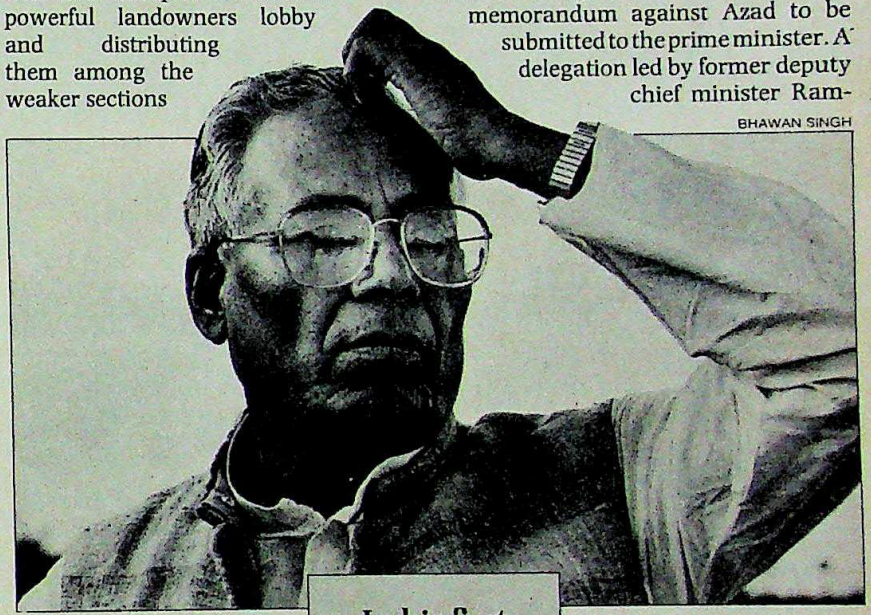
But Azad's problems continue

GANDHI Jayanti is a day when most Congressmen are in their element. They make holier-than-thou speeches, take pious pledges and inform the people that they are, in fact, the true inheritors of the Mahatma's legacy. Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad too made many promises this Gandhi Jayanti. But instead of the usual mush, his speech this year packed considerable punch.

Broadcast on radio, Azad's speech contained a dual message. The state's people were told that their chief minister did indeed have the political will to tackle their myriad problems. More crucial was the hard-hitting message sent to Congress(I) dissidents—that the abrasive leader will continue to occupy the chief minister's chair at least till the next general elections.

No shaky leader would have dared to make the promises that Azad committed himself to. Most important were the land reforms to be carried out over the next three months aimed at snatching one lakh acres of surplus land from the powerful landowners lobby and distributing them among the weaker sections with a financial backup of Rs 10 crore for the allottees. "The key word is economic development along with social justice," thundered Azad. His other promises included: 25,000 irrigation tube-wells; 25,864 hand-pumps; 17,187 drilled wells for drinking water; and construction of 8,200 km of village link roads—all to be achieved by March 1989.

BHAWAN SINGH



In his first major policy decision Azad has promised sweeping land reforms.

In his usual brisk, no-nonsense manner Azad instructed collectors to immediately ensure that allottees actually get physical possession of land—not just slips of paper—and Rs 1,000 each. "I want to see who desists the drive and dispossesses the poor," he threatened.

With the land reform scheme Azad hopes to kill two birds with one stone—win the goodwill of the rural poor and crackdown on the dissidents, many of whom are powerful landowners. Azad had earlier approached the Central Government to order income tax raids on some party leaders and their businessmen friends on the lines of the raids conducted on the Dhanbad coal mafia a few months back.

Azad's opponents in the party say these get-tough measures are a face-saving device as dissident activity was getting out of hand. Last fortnight as many as 100 legislators had held a meeting—the fourth in recent months—to chalk out strategies to seek Azad's ouster. Dissidents claimed that more than 125 legislators had signed a memorandum against Azad to be submitted to the prime minister. A delegation led by former deputy chief minister Ramjaipal Singh Yadav—who has an eye on the chief ministership—was sent to New Delhi. Congress(I) Legislature Party whips from Patna and Ranchi districts and vice-chairman of the state Urdu Academy, Dr K.R. Saba, resigned their posts. Saba, a former minister with considerable support among the Momins (backward Muslims) accused Azad of deliberately neglecting Urdu.

A worried Rajiv Gandhi held consultations with two former Bihar chief ministers—Jagannath Mishra, now an MP and Union Labour Minister Bindeshwari Dubey, but denied an audience to the dissidents camping in New Delhi. Instead, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Sheila Dixit and AICC(I) General Secretary Oscar Fernandes, in-charge of Bihar affairs, told the rebels that there was no question of any change in the state leadership. Rajiv

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then had a 45-minute meeting with Azad, who later told INDIA TODAY: "I don't want to get trapped in the dissidents' game as I have more serious work to do. Since the beginning I have tried to carry along everybody and I will continue to do so." Later, both Azad and PCC(I) chief Tariq Anwar were again summoned to New Delhi.

The high command's open support for Azad and assertions of unity, however, could not thwart the chief ministerial ambitions of many leaders. Pretenders to the throne of Bihar include:

Bindeshwari Dubey: Though he was moved to the Centre, Dubey would love to return to his home state. Last fortnight, his supporters in New Delhi were told to rush back to Patna as "anything may happen any moment" and Dubey may be taking the "oath of office".

Sitaram Kesari: Though overtly supporting Azad, the wily AICC(I) treasurer is now projecting himself as a leader of the minorities, backwards and weaker section.

Jagannath Mishra: The powerful ex-chief minister has now adopted a conciliatory stand. But he still can't resist attacking Azad at every opportunity: "People have become disillusioned with Azad because he has failed to implement any of the programmes and policies of the Government and the party."

Tariq Anwar: The MP-cum-PCC(I) chief resigned from the vice-chairmanship of the state 20-Point Programme Implementation Committee two months ago due to differences with Azad. But he too has chosen to play it safe and says: "Any attempt to oppose Azad would amount to opposing the high command...dissidents may have some valid grievances too. Maybe some people do not like Azad's style of functioning."

Other would-be chief ministers are Union Minister of State for Education L.P. Sahi, Ramjaipal Singh Yadav and Union Minister of State for Water Resources Krishna Sahi. Azad clearly faces powerful opposition—one possible explanation for why it took him eight months to make his first major policy announcement. But then, every Bihar chief minister has had his hands tied by the presence of too many political giants.

Still, Azad may have compounded his difficulties by offering the moon to the state's people. If he is able to achieve even half of what he has promised, he would have succeeded. But if he fails to deliver, the dissidents will get what they have been clamouring for—his head.

—FARZAND AHMED

KERALA

Hard Lessons

LDF caught in education row

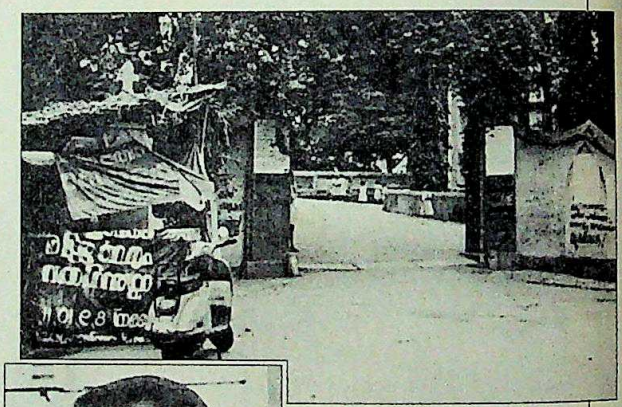
FOR Kerala, the state with the highest literacy rate in the country, education is one of the most sensitive subjects. It is not surprising then, that state Education Minister K. Chandrasekharan is dogged by controversies, primarily involving private educational institutions run by the minority Christian community.

Last fortnight, Chandrasekharan ran into trouble when, without consulting Education Secretary Babu Paul, he de-recognised the prestigious Holy Angels Convent High School in Trivandrum. The school, run by the sisters of the Carmelite Congregation, is over 100 years old and has produced more rank holders in the school leaving examination than all the other schools in the state put together.

Trouble, in fact, started brewing last June when the school management dismissed 15 teachers who it claimed, "did not possess the prescribed qualification". Seven of the dismissed teachers promptly joined the powerful CPI(M) wing, the Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), and launched an agitation in front of the school gates for their reinstatement. While Holy Angels obtained a court order for police protection, the teachers challenged their dismissal in the high court and approached the education minister for justice. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government took up their cause. But the school management succeeded in getting a stay order against government proceedings.

In his haste to please the CITU, Chandrasekharan—a Janata member of the LDF coalition—de-recognised Holy Angels without bothering to check out the facts. "We resorted to this because the school management was unwilling to abide by the Kerala Educational Rules," he says. What he forgot to add, however, was that Holy Angles was an unaided school and did not get any government grants. There are 320 unaided schools among the state's 7,100 private schools. As such, Holy Angles is free to administer the school in any way it chooses.

The volley of protests following the incident, particularly from the Christian clergy which dominates the educational set-up in Kerala, was only to be expected. Alleged Archbishop Bendict Mar Gregorious, Catholic Bishops Conference of India president: "It's a planned attempt by the Government to wipe out the private sector from the education scene." As the controversy snowballed into a major political crisis, the E.K. Nayanar Ministry developed cold feet and asked Chandrasekharan to withdraw the order. He was left with no choice but to "suspend the order temporarily".



Holy Angels Convent; (left) Chandrasekharan

Chandrasekharan was soon caught up in another debate, this time involving the Calicut University over the decision of its syndicate to grant University Grants Commission pay-scales to its teachers. Chandrasekharan says the decision was illegal as he was not consulted in the matter by the newly-appointed Vice-Chancellor, T.K. Ravindran.

But the real reason for opposing the new grades is the fear that it will lead to similar demands from other state universities and increase the financial burden. State planners have already sent him feelers to hike school and college fees for raising finances. But, given the string of controversies he's been embroiled in, it is highly unlikely that Chandrasekharan will choose to brave another storm by agreeing. —SREEDHAR PILLAI

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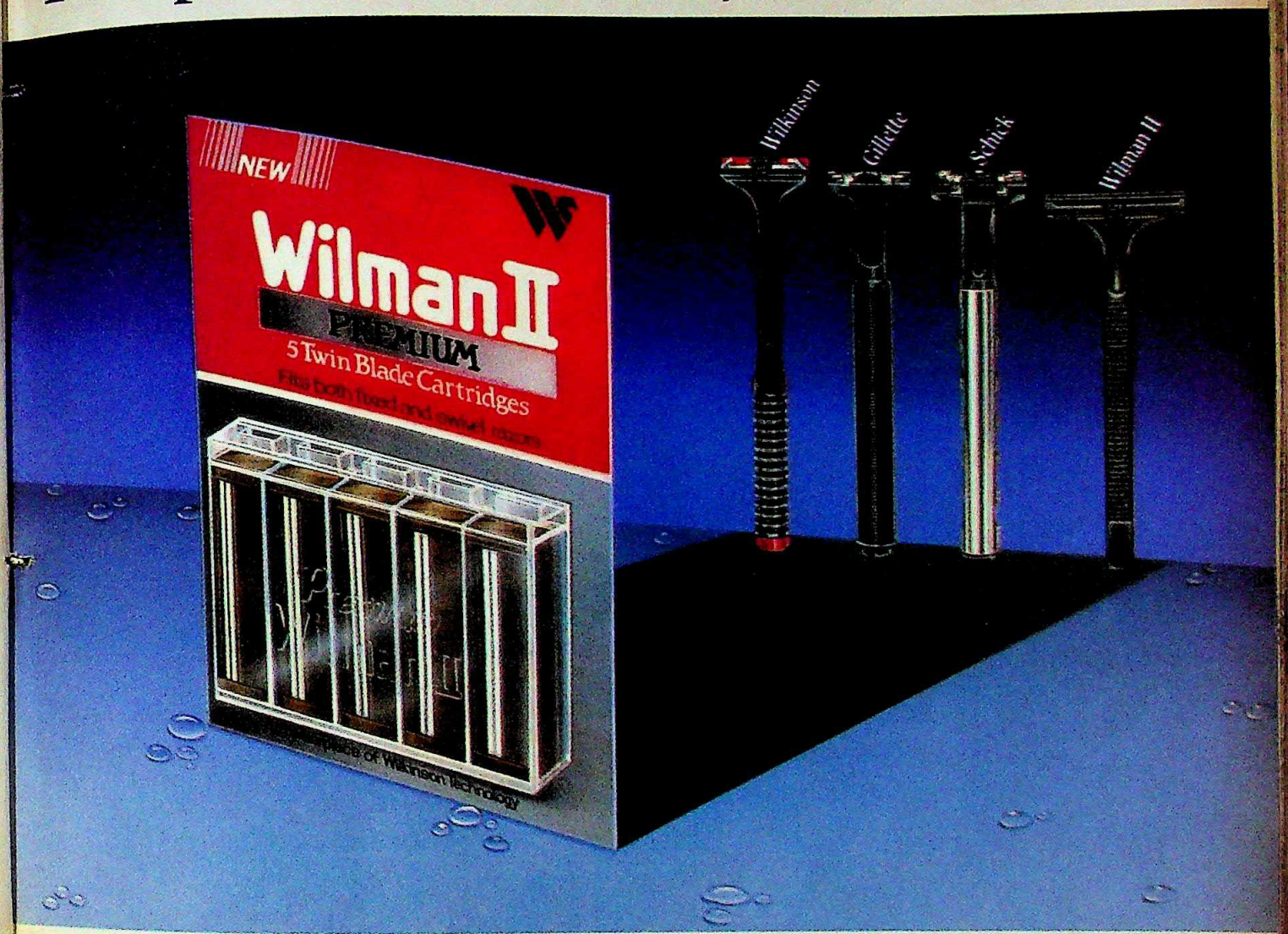

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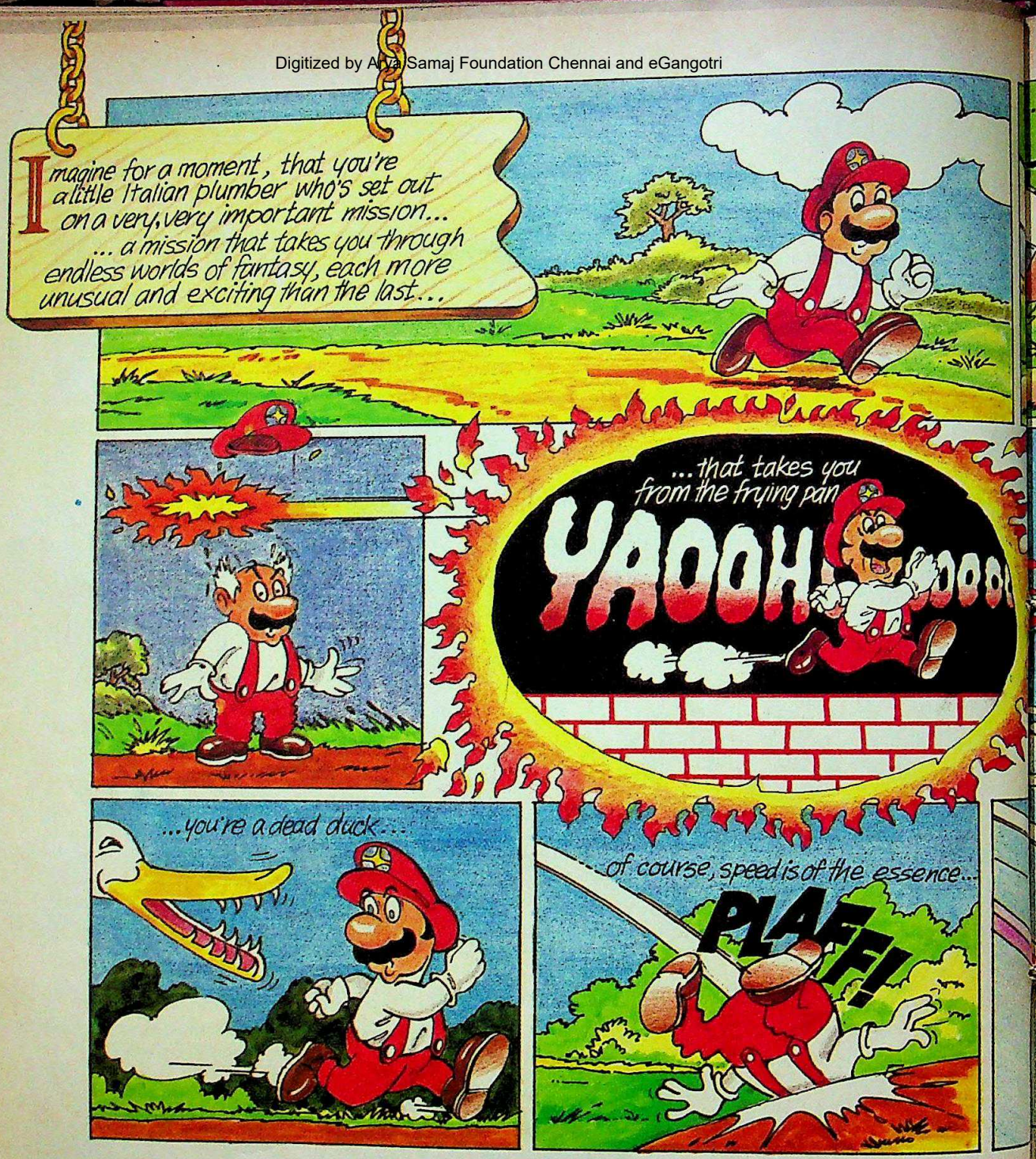

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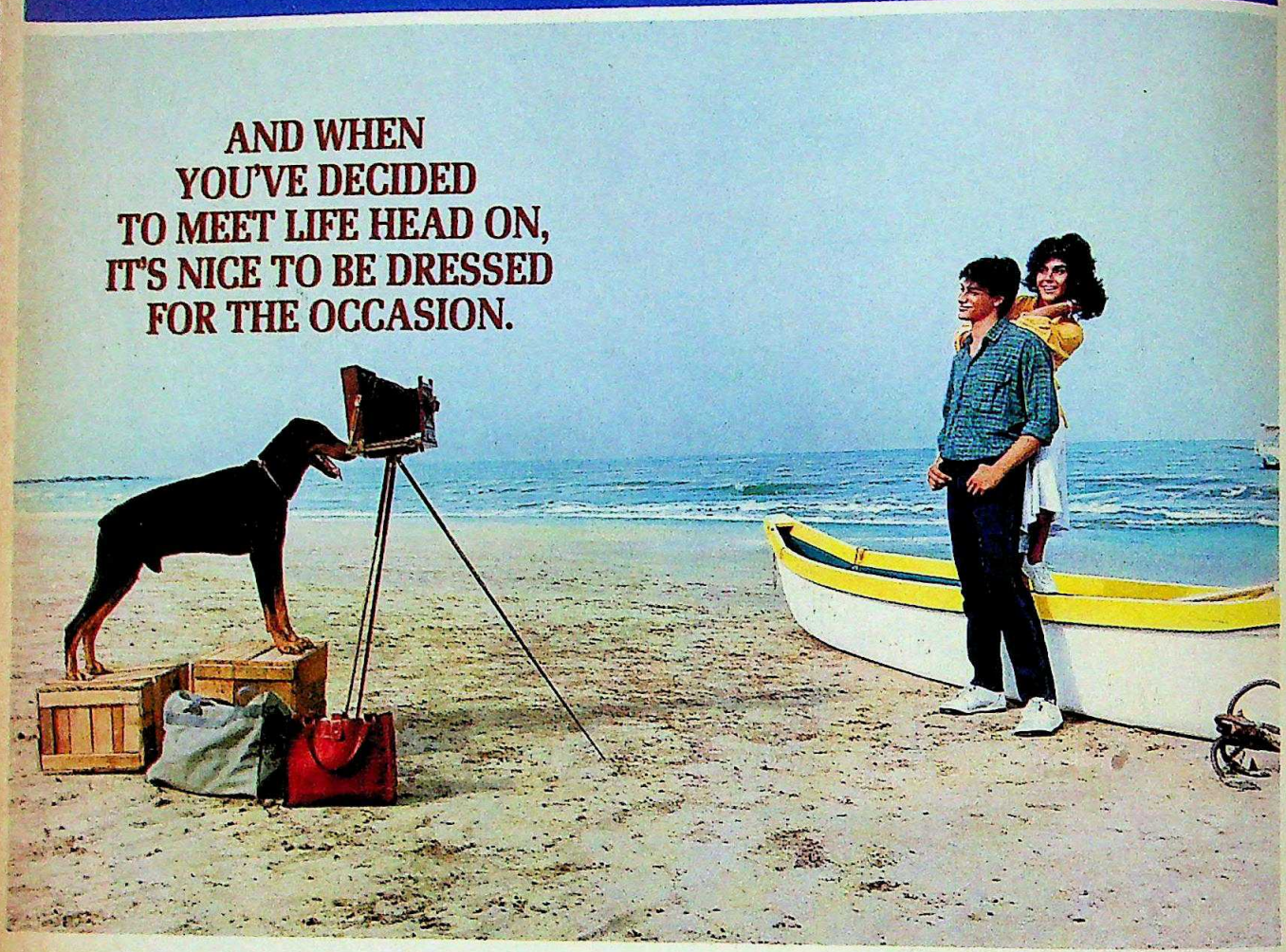

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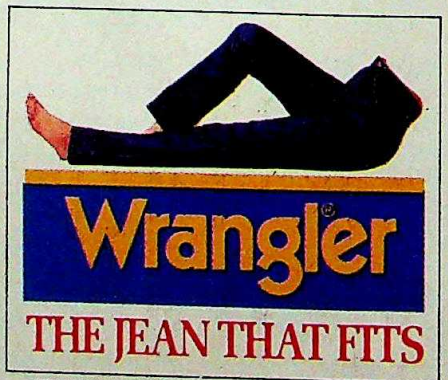

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AZAD'S MEMOIRS

Still Secret

But court breaks open seal

MYSTERY can give a piquant edge to anything. And when a sensational bit of national history is involved, interest is bound to be wide-eyed. So it's been through this year, as India waited for the contents of the 'Azad papers'—the censored pages of Congress leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's autobiography. Thirty years after the book was published, a version complete with the 30 hitherto secret pages will be available for the first time next month.

The secret has already been kept eight months longer than it should have, as the authors' heirs and the publishers wrangled in courts across the country. Legal history of sorts was made when Delhi High Court's Justice B.N. Kirpal ruled that the work was jointly authored by Azad and Humayun Kabir, Azad's junior in the then Union council of ministers. Azad would talk to him of his memories, experiences and opinions in Urdu every evening. Kabir would then prepare an English draft and present it to Azad for corrections. The nationalist leader, embittered by the Partition, was critical of some of his fellow freedom fighters, including Nehru and Sardar Patel. Soon after Azad's sudden death in 1958, Kabir deposited copies of the most explosive portions in the National Archives and the National Library, to be opened on the 30th anniversary of Azad's death—February 22 of this year.

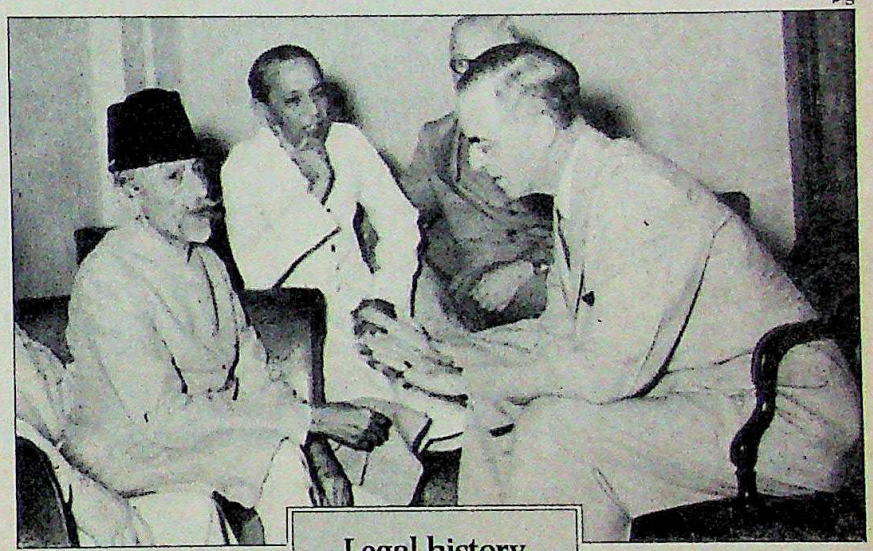
It was a few days before that, that hectic legal wrangles began (INDIA TODAY, March 15). Azad's relatives, led by Congress(I) MP Najma Heptullah, demanded accounts of royalties from the publisher, Orient Longman, pending which they did not want the papers opened. An injunction was given, first by the Delhi district court, to be succeeded in March by the high court. Kabir's daughter Jayati Leila joined battle, seeking immediate publication "so that the wishes of the dead might be fulfilled". Also fighting to publish, of course, were Longman. Their counsel, Praveen Anand, was a happy man last month, after Kirpal accepted his plea for joint authorship. "It's a path-breaking judgement," said he. It was crucial for Longman that authorship be given to both the dead men. It was Kabir who contracted the copyright to Longman in September 1958. If he was not held an author, there would have been a big question mark over Longman's rights. Yet, to have Kabir declared sole author would have affected sales. Public interest, after all, is in what Azad wrote.

While Leila's aim was the same as Longman's—early publication—Pinky Anand, her counsel, claimed Kabir was the sole author. She cited English court rulings that when a prominent person relates his experiences to a journalist or other writer, the subsequent publication is the work of the journalist. "As a matter of statute, Kabir was the author," Anand insists, but explains that she did not copy. Kirpal even refused Leila's plea that as a legal heir of one of the authors, she should be given a copy and the right to compare it with Longman's proofs before the book was printed. The point was not contested to avoid delay.

Already, eight months had been lost because Longman appealed against an enlightened order by Justice Bhagwati Prasad Banerjee of the Calcutta High Court last February. He had granted Leila's prayer that the seals be broken and the contents released to the press forthwith so that the nation might immediately know its heritage.

Longman obtained a stay while it appeal against the judgement to avoid further delay in publication.

PIB



Maulana Azad with British cabinet members

Legal history was made when Justice Kirpal ruled that Azad's work was co-authored by Humayun Kabir.

Heptullah's case was that her grand-uncle Azad was the sole author and Kabir was only in the nature of a stenographer. Kirpal rejected both the sole authorship arguments, noting that while Kabir actually wrote the work, Azad scrupulously went through the drafts, amending, adding, deleting and altering as he went. It is clear, the judge held, "that there was active and close intellectual collaboration and cooperation" between the two.

With his ruling on August 19, which validated Longman's claim to publish, Kirpal vacated the injunction against unsealing the documents. But it was only on September 29 that the seals were finally broken before a packed court. Not that the secret was immediately out. Only Longman was given a photostat contested the order before a division bench of the Calcutta High Court. The company wanted its commercial interests protected through secrecy about the contents until the complete book hits the market. Banerjee's order was struck down in June on the technical ground that a writ petition is not maintainable when the Government is one of the parties to a contract, in this case the one between Kabir and the National Archives and the National Library.

While these two organisations have now been relieved of their most heavily guarded possession, the story is still not over. With so many false starts and unexpected hurdles since the beginning of this year, the end of this long track is near, if still unknown. —DAVID DEVADAS

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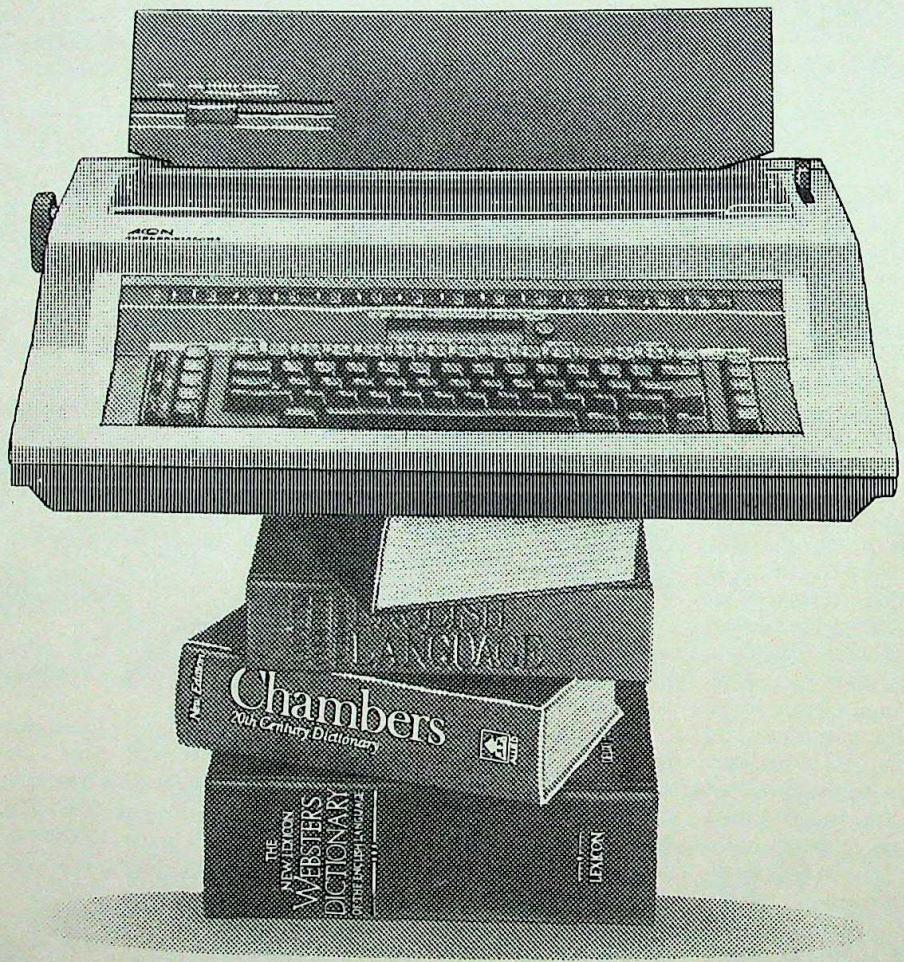

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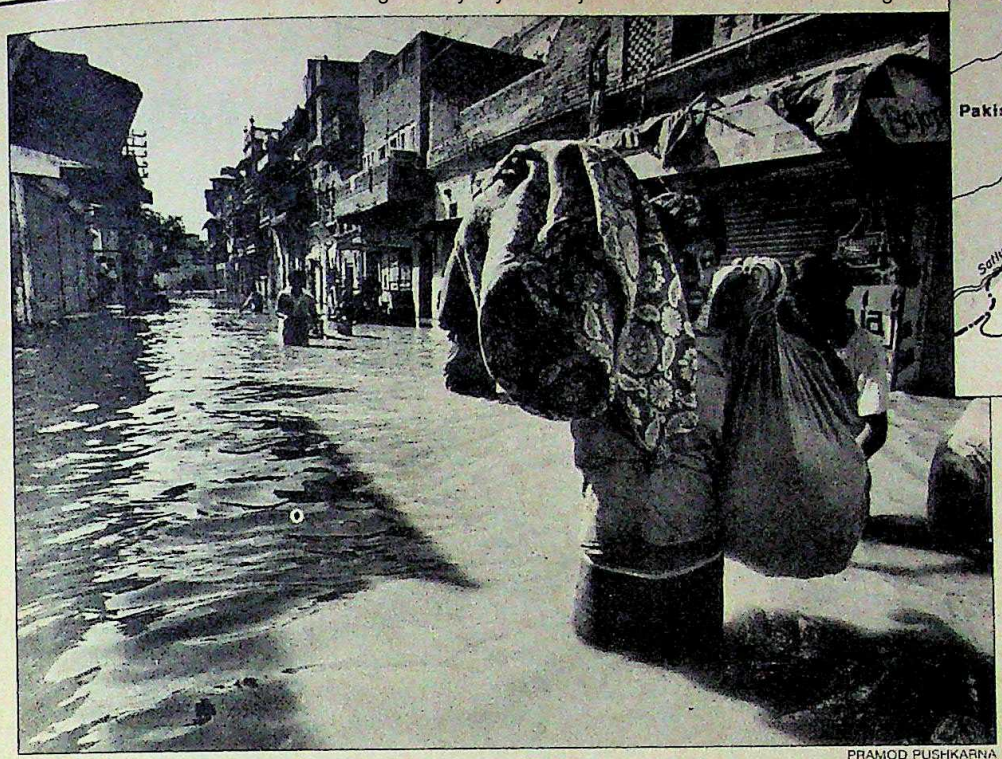

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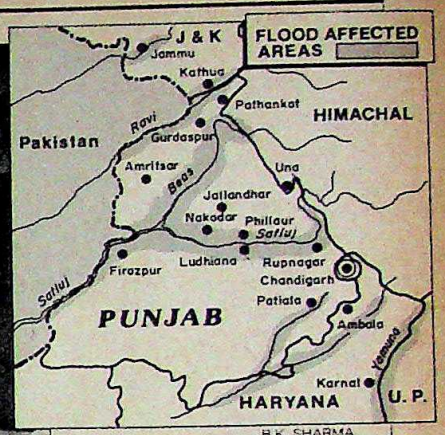

B.K. SHARMA

Floods enter Ferozepur city: heavy losses

PUNJAB

Watery Woes

Floods reverse crop prospects

PUNJAB'S major problems have invariably been man-made. Terrorism included. The state's cup of misery flowed over once again last fortnight when massive releases of water from the Bhakra and Pong dams helped to inundate 75 to 80 per cent of what promised to be a record kharif crop in the fertile districts of Jalandhar Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ferozepur and Kapurthala, and killed 1,500 people.

Accusing fingers were soon pointed at the Beas Bhakra Management Board which was held responsible for triggering off the devastation by releasing—without adequate warning—the waters which overnight turned the Beas and Sutlej into Punjab's rivers of sorrow. Much of the loss of life and crops along the Beas and Sutlej river basins could have been averted if the discharges from the Bhakra and Pong dams had been spread out over a longer period of time.

The chairman of the Bhakra Beas Management Board, Major-General B.N. Kumar—who says he would welcome an inquiry into the way the situation was handled by the dam authorities—however, insists that they had no option but to release water as the Bhakra dam was in peril. A uniform discharge of water was not possible because of the freak weather and a cloudburst between September 22 and 26. The flash floods, Kumar maintains was a "once in a thousand years phenomenon".

Instead, he blames the meteorological department for not forewarning them of the sudden rainfall. The floods could have been controlled if the weather office had predicted the heavy downpour, he says. In such an eventuality, the Bhakra and Pong dam managers would have kept the water levels considerably lower to avoid the destructive discharge. Kumar points out that the reservoirs at the two dams were brimming when lakhs of cusecs of rainwater started pouring in.

The meteorological office did appear to have bungled badly. For the entire month of September, the weathermen had predicted only 121 mm of rainfall. To make matters worse, a communication from the weather department, signed by its director-general, said that rainfall in September is likely to be deficient by 18 per cent. The authorities at the two dams were thus expecting just 100 mm of rain. At Bhakra, for instance, the water level was kept close to its maximum capacity of 1,400 feet.

But in just four days, between September 23 and 26, the Bhakra area recorded a staggering 640 mm of rainfall and Pong 644 mm. In fact, on September 26, Bhakra received 85 mm of rain in just 45 minutes—which was close to what the weathermen had predicted for the entire month.

According to the state's Irrigation Secretary Rajinder Singh, this was the first time when the three major rivers of Punjab—Ravi, Beas and Sutlej— overflowed their banks at the same time. While the 1978 floods were caused by the Ravi, and those in 1955 by the Sutlej, this year the waters of the three rivers simultaneously inundated vast stretches of cultivated land.

The enormity of the destruction wreaked by waters of the two dams can be gauged by the fact that the total outflow from Bhakra alone was over 4 lakh cusecs between September 25 and 28. The outflow in these four days was nearly twice the total discharge in the entire month of August (2.5 lakh cusecs). Similarly, the water discharge from Pong dam during the same period was over 7 lakh cusecs compared to only 1.5 lakh cusecs in the previous month.

Clearly, there was not much time to warn people against the impending disaster. When the warning did come, it was too late for the villagers to save their homes, crops and often, their very lives. Worse, they did not take the threat seriously—many of the village elders who had weathered the floods of 1955 and 1978 were confident that they would be able to tackle another round of floods. But they had little idea of what was to come.

Ten-feet high cascades of water from the two reservoirs washed way entire

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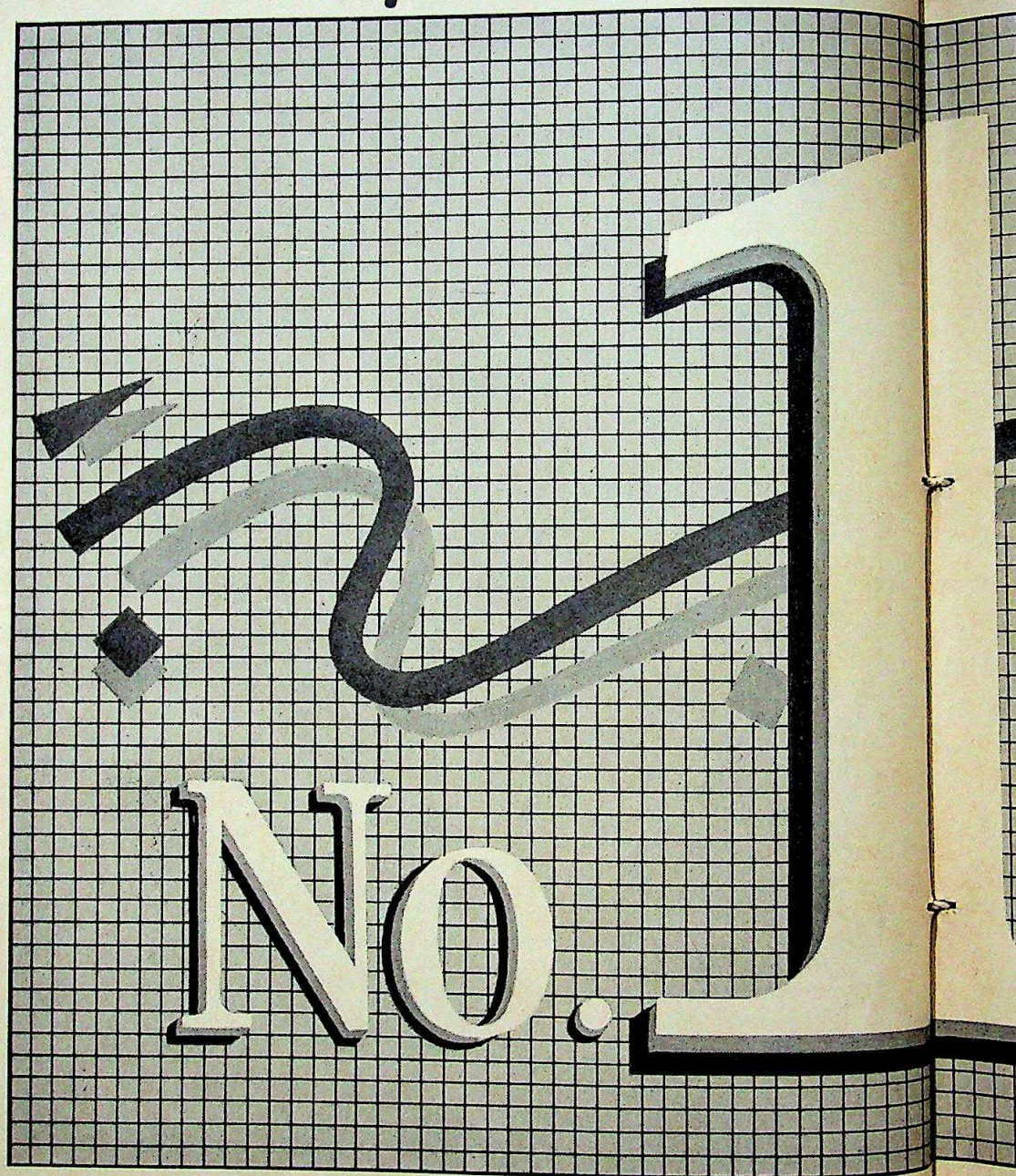
The Hindustan Times is No.1 in more ways than one



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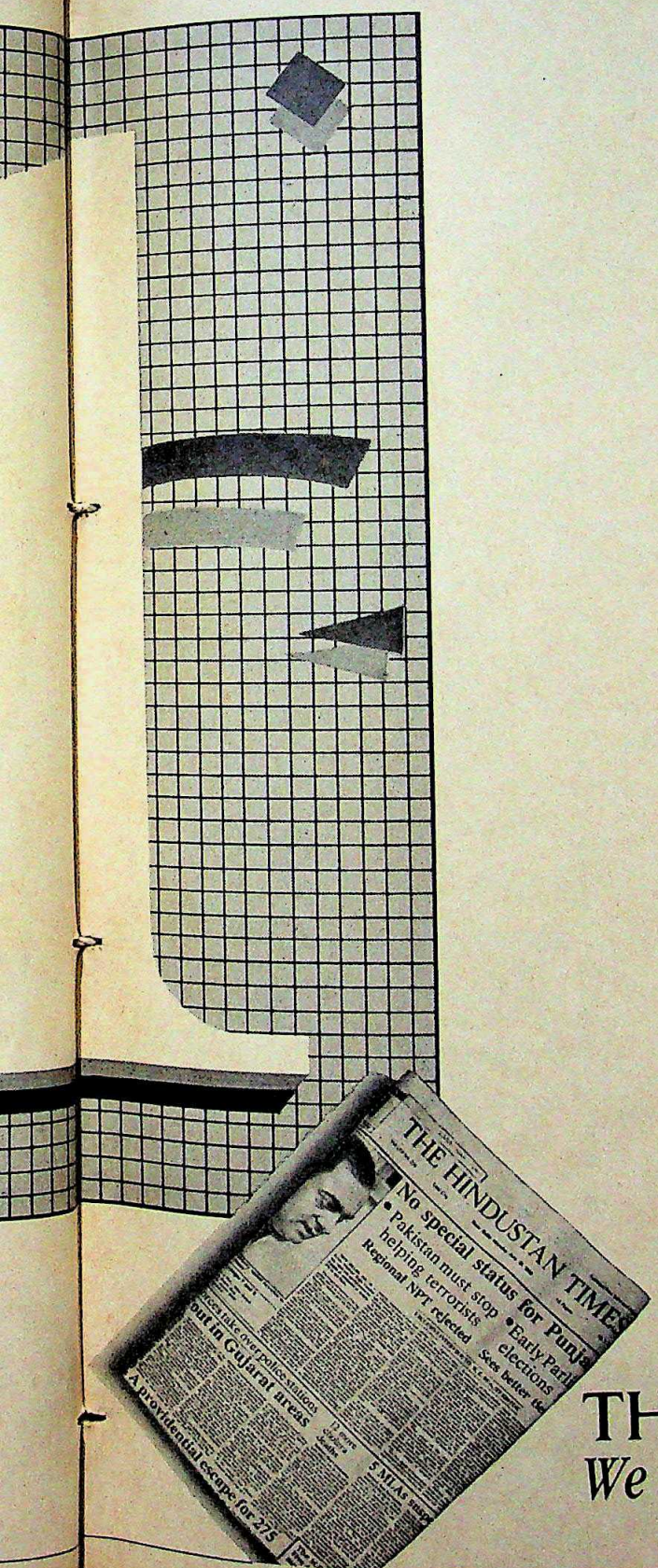

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villages within hours. Roads and bridges were inundated. The entire communications network in the state was snapped. The link road system disappeared under a sea of water. Wireless was the only means of communication between Chandigarh, the state capital, and the districts while the affected villages could be reached only by helicopters and the army's motorised boats.

Just when the farmers of Punjab were rejoicing over a bumper kharif crop this year, four days of incessant rainfall washed away their hopes. The vagaries of weather had delivered a crippling blow to the granary of India, which was reeling under the worst floods in living memory. What made the tragedy more poignant is that the life-giving monsoons had come after three years of erratic rains and drought. Preliminary estimates put the losses incurred by the agricultural sector alone at around Rs 300 to 500 crore.

Along with the crop, lives too were lost. Apart from the 1,500 people killed, another 500 were listed as missing. Official figures, always conservative, put the toll at 607 dead and over 92 missing. Nine thousand of Punjab's 12,989 villages were flooded, of which over 2,500 were completely marooned or simply washed away. The deluge disrupted the lives of over 34 lakh people.

When disaster struck, it seemed as if Punjab would be washed away by the very rivers after which the state is named. Even as the people were trying to cope with their misery, the Union Agriculture Minister Bhajan Lal struck an incongruous note when he declared that the floods were a blessing in disguise—his logic being that it would increase Punjab's ground water level. Despite Bhajan Lal's incredible optimism, all that the state's farmers can now do is to count their losses. Even Governor Siddhartha Shankar Ray held out little hope for the farmers when he said: "We cannot compensate for such enormous losses. All we can do is to provide relief to the affected people."

—VIPUL MUDGAL

BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Seoul Searching

INDIAN athletes returned empty-handed from yet another Olympics last fortnight. But that medalless status is usually adequately compensated by the meddlesome officials who pick up their Gold, Silver and Brauns at the officials' Olympics held subsequently in Hong Kong or Dubai.

Now that the show is over, it's time for the usual Seoul-searching. Can P.T. Usha ever get over the pain in her Nambiar region? Can Indian boxers put more power into their paunches? Can the wrestlers come to grips with their short-goings? Can the hockey team ever overcome their currency conversion problems?

Actually, it is obvious where the problem lies—everybody lies about his performance. In fact, there are any number of candidates who would perform better were they given a chance. Here are some examples:

100 metres (men): Any one of Rajiv's personal security guards who are trained to sprint alongside his speeding vehicle.

100 metres (women): Mani Shankar Iyer (also known as flaw-jaw) who performs best in the company of women.

400 metres Relay: Indian bureaucrats who are so adept at passing the buck that passing the baton should be a breeze.

400 metres High hurdles: Chandra Shekhar, the Ed Moses of the Opposition, whose hurdles record is unbeatable.

Gymnastics: H.N. Bahuguna, whose political somersaults and backflips would be the envy of a Daniela Silivas.

Diving: Rajiv Gandhi, whose popularity dive from the highboard has been as stunning as Louganis' was.

Wrestling: The average Indian commuter who has to grapple his way into a bus or a train every morning in the face of the toughest competition.

Archery: Arun Govil, who can hit a target as small as an arrow head every time without fail.

50 km walk: Sunil Dutt, who has perfected the padyatra and shown that he can maintain a blistering pace.

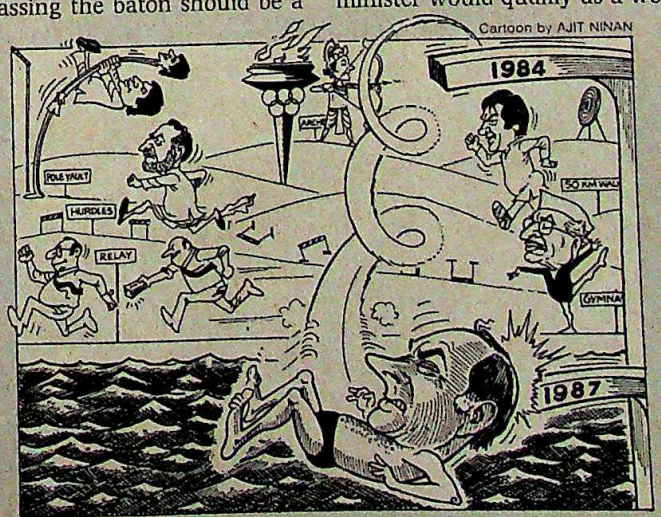
Pole Vault: Ajitabh Bachchan, whose vault into Switzerland from a Bombay suburb would earn him gold against any competition.

Badminton: Shiv Shankar, who is now so used to the shuttle service in his frequent reallocation of portfolios that he could play the game blindfolded.

Marathon (men): Suresh Kalmadi (also known as Mota Rosa) whose Freedom Runs and Pune Marathons indicate that he could go the distance, especially if Rajiv is around for inspiration.

Marathon (women): Rekha, who has been ahead of the pack for so long and is so used to being number one that any rival would have a hard time staying in front.

Triple Jump: Arjun Singh, whose hop as chief minister, skip to cabinet minister and then jump back as chief minister would qualify as a world record.



Shooting: The official Indian team armed with the Bofors gun as a secret weapon could out-shoot the competition if the prize was tempting enough.

Boxing: Members of the Lok Sabha, who have shown that when it comes to trading blows they have no equals.

Chief Coach: Satish Sharma, whose advice and instructions from the sidelines would ensure that his team returned much richer in rewards.

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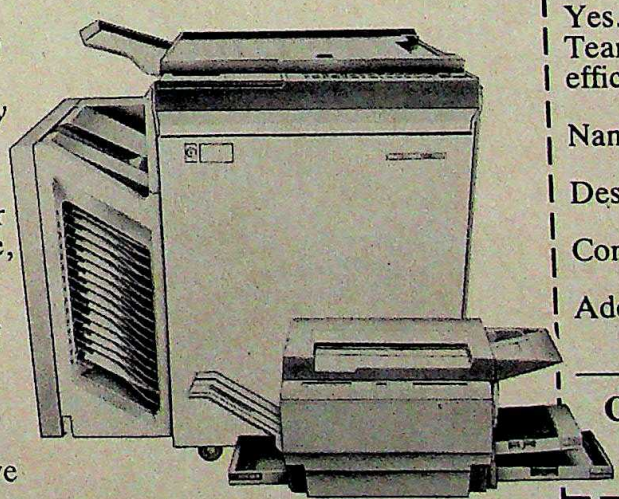

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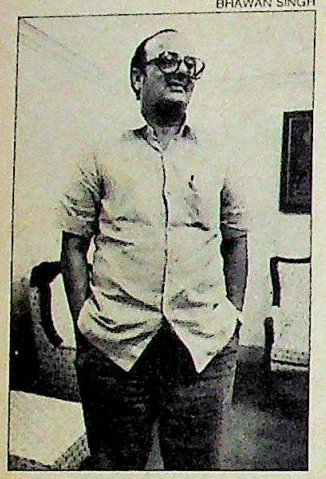
Clearing Out Criminals

A time bomb is ticking in the Madhya Pradesh PCC-I office. Chief Minister Arjun Singh has sent a list of persons with 'criminal backgrounds' to state party chief Chandulal Chandrakar. These alleged economic offenders and land-grabbers had found a place on the officially-appointed 20-point programme implementation committees when Motilal Vora was chief minister. Since they are 'distinguished' members of the Congress(I), Singh wants Chandrakar's consent before their names are ticked off the committee. The Government, with help from intelligence agencies and the police, prepared the politically-sensitive dossiers last month, as part of a clean-up drive launched by Singh. He'd earlier received complaints that undesirable elements had got a berth in these powerful committees by using their political links.

BHAWAN SINGH



Arjun Singh: clean-up drive

Not to be outdone, the dissident group has rushed a memorandum to the high command listing the bad characters who'd been appointed party office-bearers by Digvijay Singh—a Singh protege—when he was president of the state PCC(I). The memorandum gives details of the backgrounds of these office-bearers. Murder, rape, dacoity, cheating, running organised gangs, you name it, every crime is there. Congressmen, it would appear, can give the mafiosi a run for their money.

Routine Circuit

There are signs of a strange New Delhi-London axis emerging. At least if some recent bureaucratic postings to Uttar Pradesh are any indication. Indeed, New Delhi-London has become the shortest route from Delhi to Lucknow. First, when N.D. Tiwari was touring some foreign countries as Union finance minister and had reached London on June 23, the Prime Minister's Office summoned him back. The return trip took him through Delhi to Lucknow on June 25, where he took over as chief minister.

Shiromani Sharma: familiar route

Strangely, this was roughly the itinerary of Shiromani Sharma, the state's new chief secretary, when he left Delhi on September 27 on a foreign tour in his capacity as Union textile secretary. In London the next day, a long-distance call from Delhi summoned him immediately. He had been named Uttar Pradesh's new chief secretary. But Sharma—whose reluctance to go to Uttar Pradesh is common knowledge—refused to curtail his trip. So on completing the tour, he landed in Lucknow on October 12 to take his new charge. Now a senior police officer of the Uttar Pradesh cadre posted in London is being tipped to take over as director-general of police from R.N. Gupta who retires in December. Thus the return circuit will remain practically the same. Said an Uttar Pradesh official: "London seems to be the voodoo town. Now those reluctant to come to Lucknow from Delhi will avoid trips to London."

Driven by Desperation

What Andhra Pradesh Roads and Buildings Minister K. Jagna Reddy intended as a leisurely stroll across Nalgonda district (area: 14,240 sq km, population: 2.5 million) was transformed into a considerably more hectic 'car yatra'. Reddy's aims stretched beyond the customary inspection of roads and buildings under his charge. With just a little over a year to go for the Lok Sabha and assembly elections, Reddy sought to renew contact with people all over the district. "My idea is to find out the problems, clear bottle-necks and cut red tape which are holding up

Jagna Reddy in Nalgonda on his "car yatra"

schemes intended for the people," said Reddy. The agenda originally comprised a 51-day march through the district between October 2 and November 22 touching as many as 500 villages. For over two weeks Reddy went for a morning jog in preparation for the long trek ahead. But the walk proved a non-starter.

Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao however had different ideas. Four days before Reddy began the march, Rama Rao asked him to be available as a member of a cabinet subcommittee to negotiate prices and procurement of paddy for the state from rice millers and even suggested Reddy make weekend trips by car. Driven to desperation, Reddy set out on his car yatra on Gandhi Jayanti to hand out land assignment and loan papers and receive petitions from villagers. "This is the best time to reach people in rural areas in my district because they are free and will begin getting back to the farms in November," argued Reddy. "If I were to do this next year everybody will call it an election stunt." Rama Rao, however, appears to think that stunt time has already begun.

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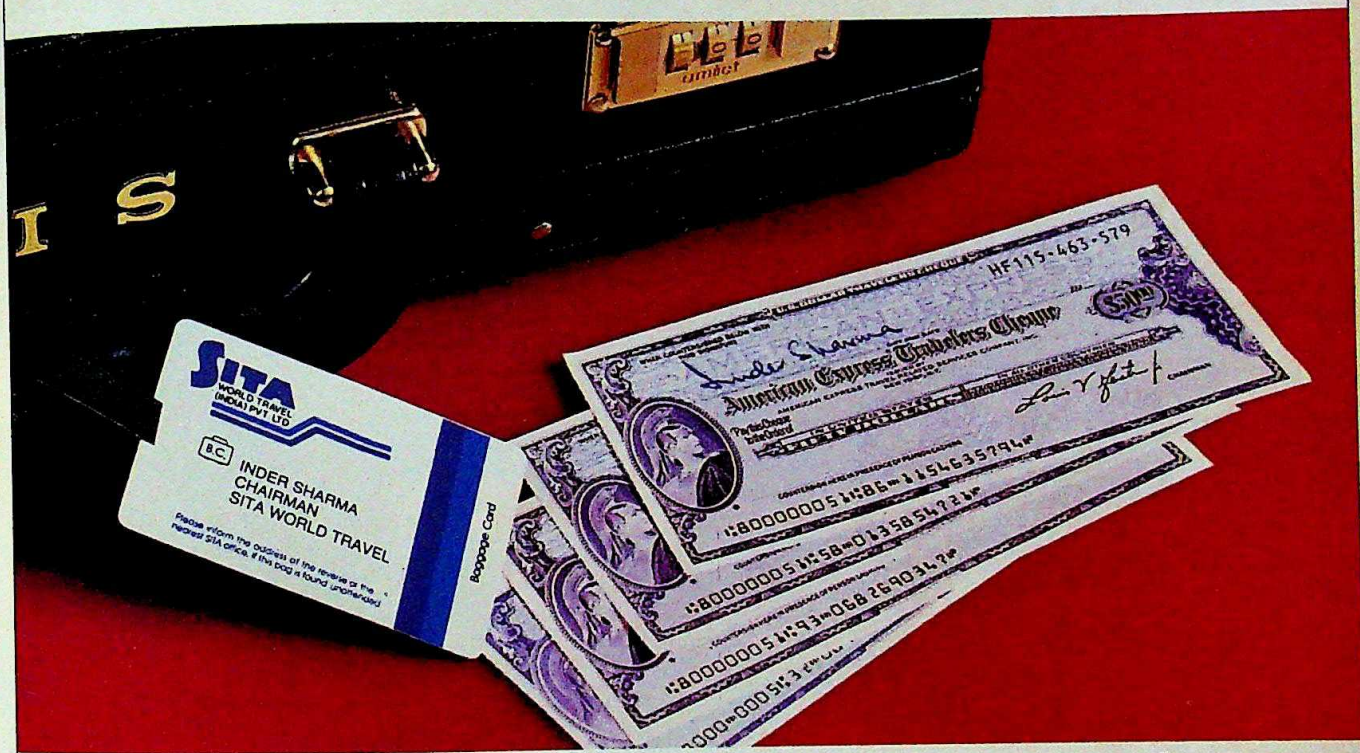

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C) For flair in formals Ravi wears a simple three piece vest over a loose cotton shirt. Trousers are pleated. A red tie adds the contrast.

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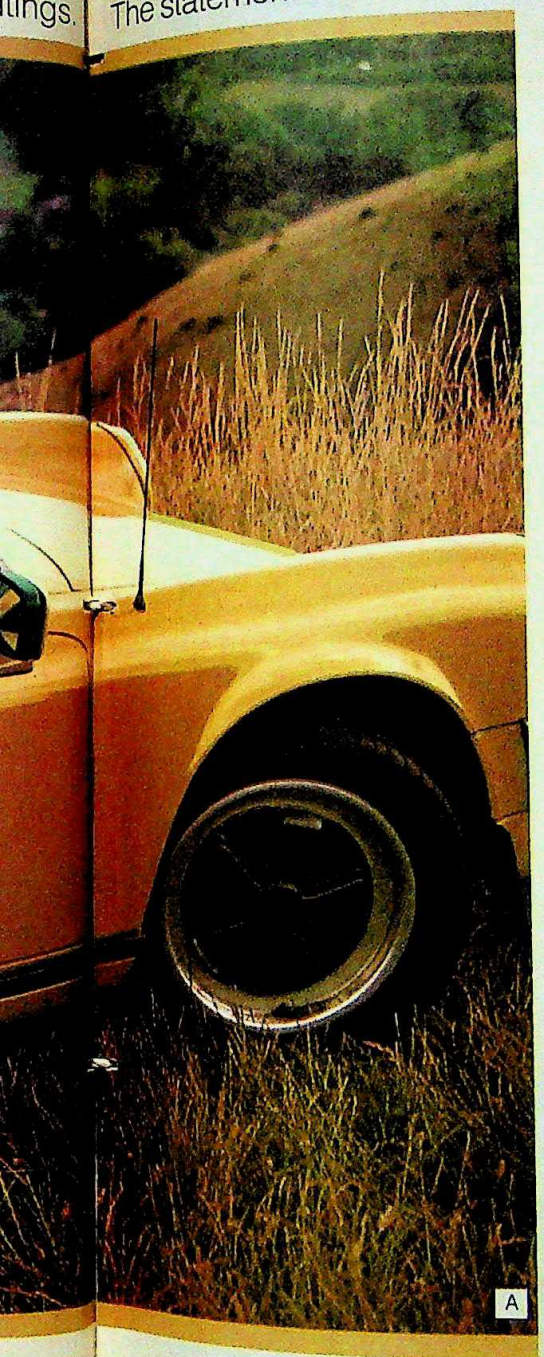
itings.

The statement of Ravi Shastri.



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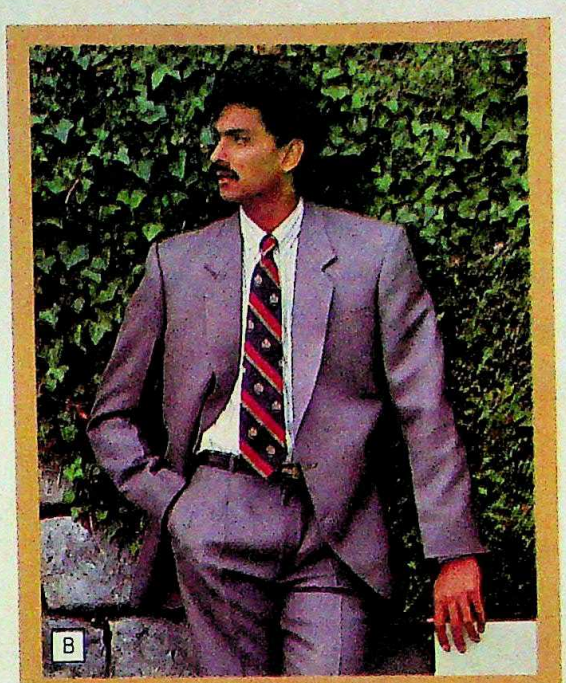

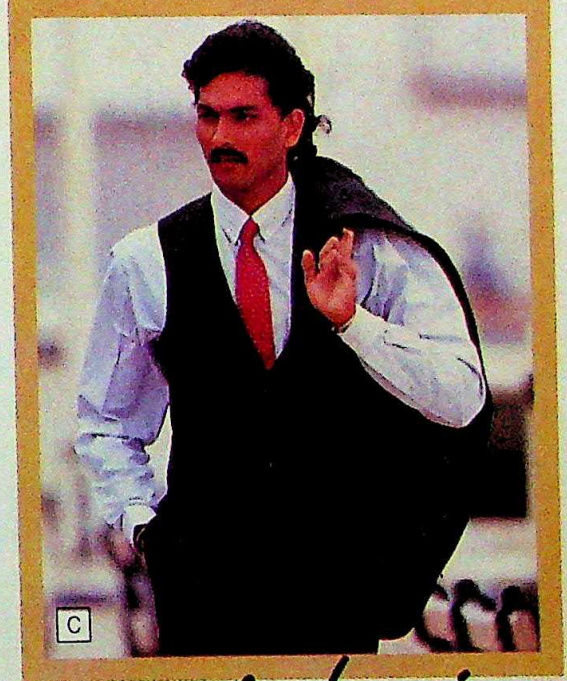

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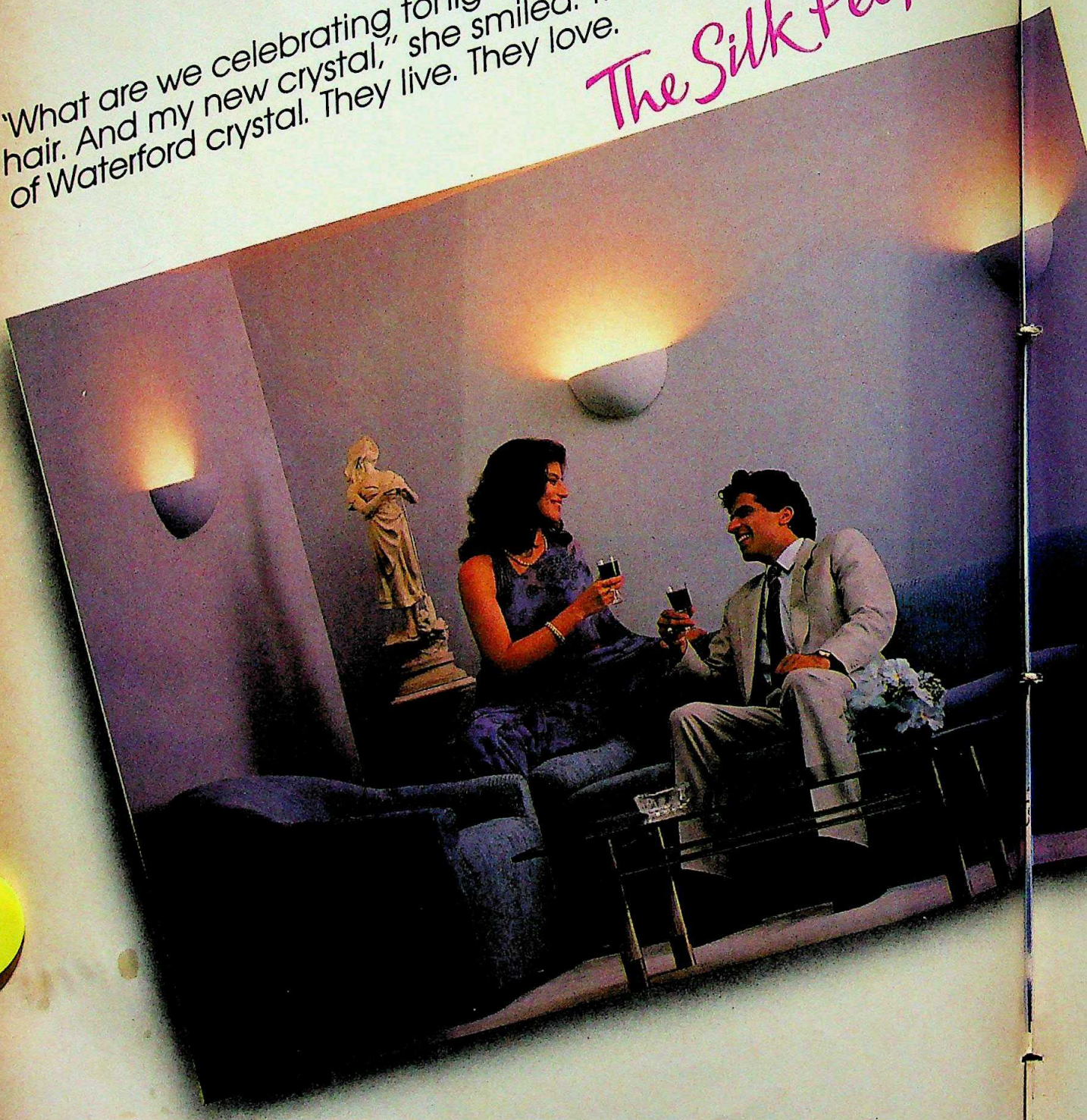
"What are we celebrating tonight?" he asked. "Your first grey hair. And my new crystal," she smiled. Their laughter, the tinkle of Waterford crystal. They live. They love.

The Silk People



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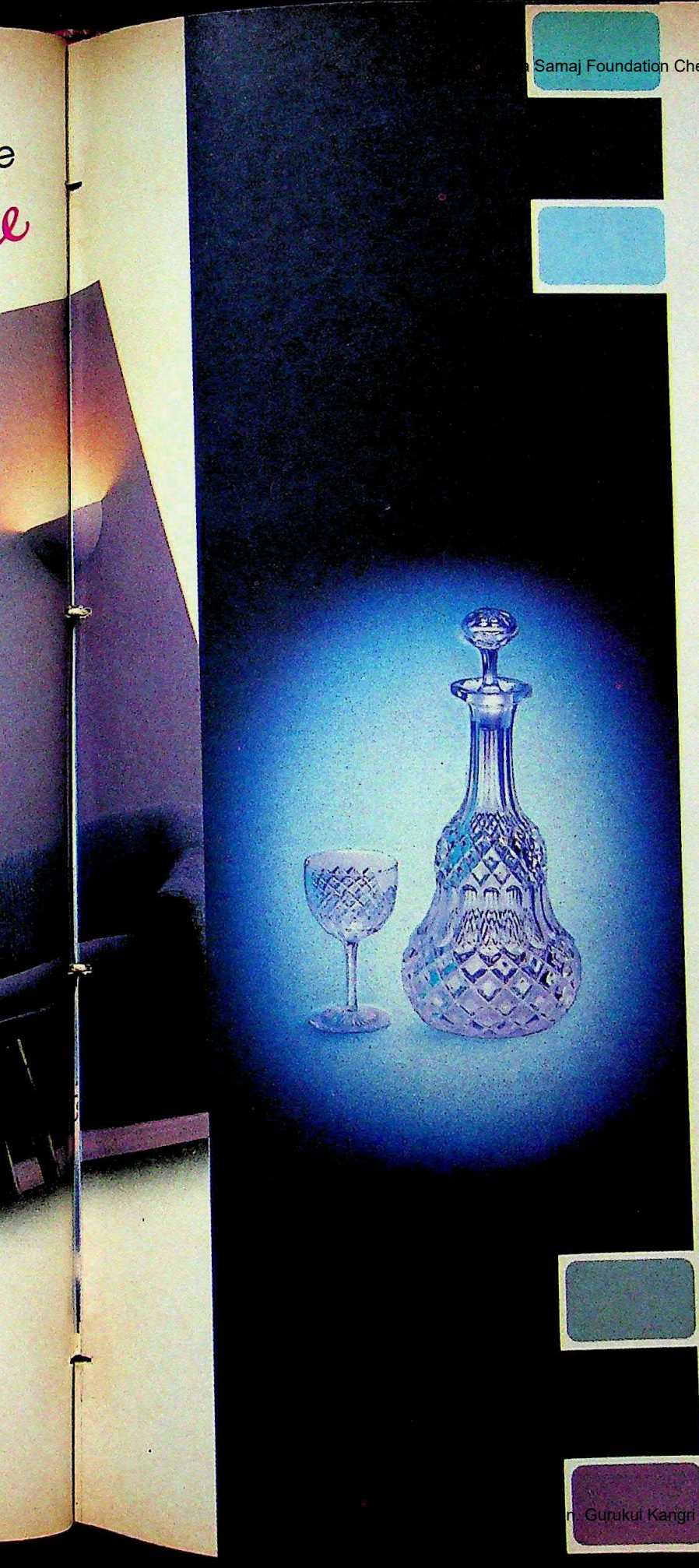

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FAMILY PLANNING

THE GREAT HOAX

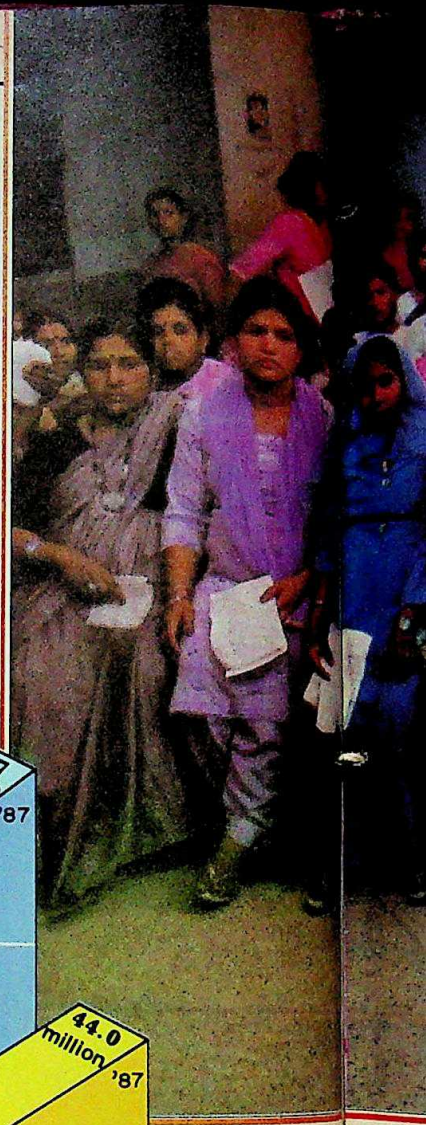
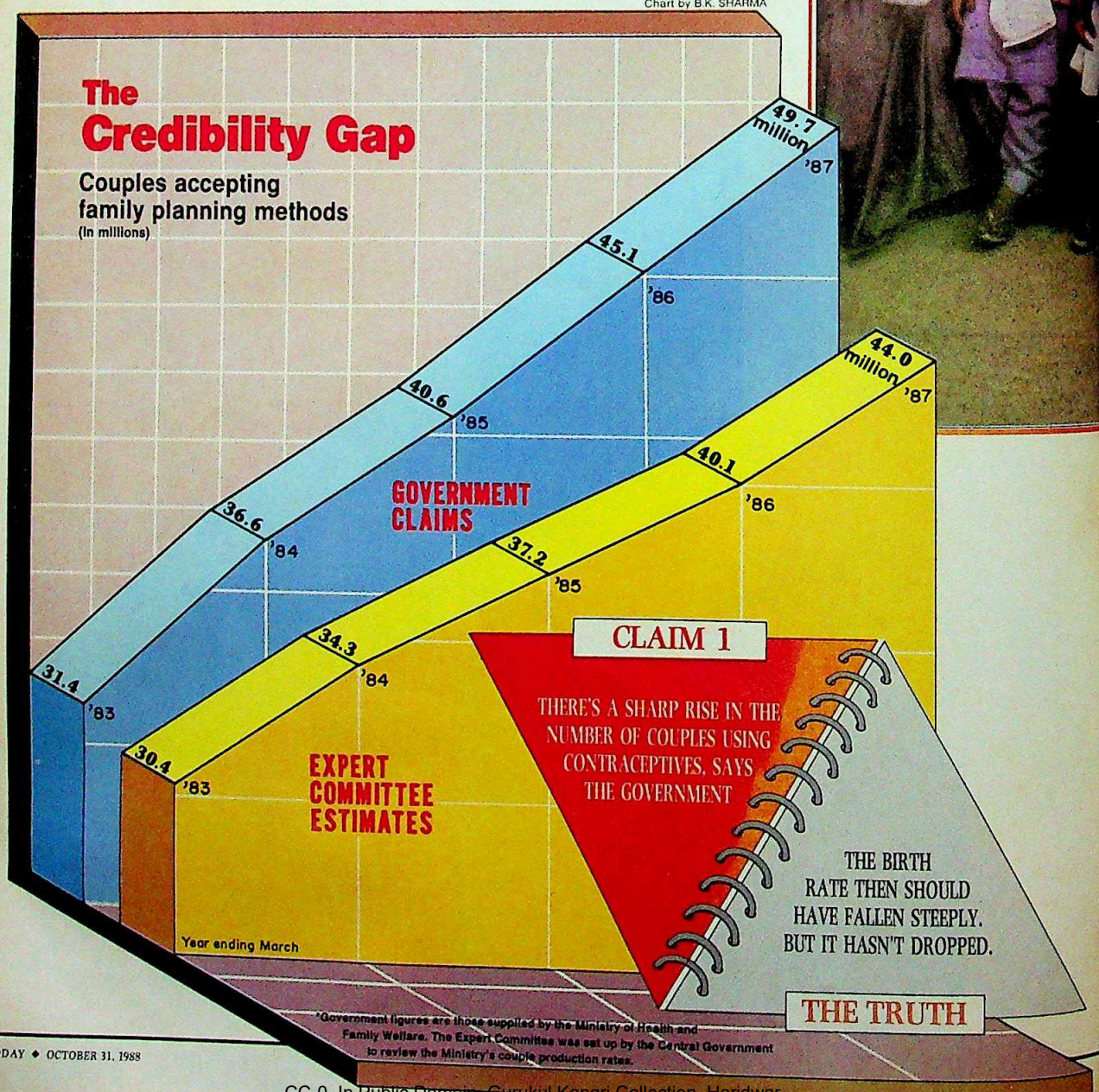


Chart by B.K. SHARMA

The Credibility Gap

Couples accepting family planning methods
(In millions)



*Government figures are those supplied by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The Expert Committee was set up by the Central Government to review the Ministry's couple production rates.

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RAGHU RAI

Pregnant women waiting for check-up in a Delhi hospital: the baby boom

IN a darkened hall off Bombay's crowded Chembur, a gold-plated clock ticks quietly away. It doesn't mark seconds or minutes, but people being added. India's people.

Every 1.2 seconds and tick. The last digit moves. An Indian is born. By the end of the minute: 50 more. Within the hour: 3,000. By the day's end: 70,000.

Last month, the clock, installed at the government-funded International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), ticked rapidly away to a landmark: 800 million. Since Independence, in fact, another India has been added—in numbers. Now one out of seven people in the world is an Indian.

Disturbingly, the country's population continues to grow at a prodigious 2.13 per cent annually. The nation now adds 16 million people every year or as Professor P.N. Srivastava, member, Planning Commission, puts it, "an Australia".

That disconcerting rate has remained static since 1977 and shows no sign of dropping. And this despite the country pumping in Rs 3,000 crore in the past decade to boost its mammoth family planning programme—three times the amount for the previous 30 years put together. And despite government claims that, thanks to its efforts, the number of couples adopting contraceptive methods has risen dramatically—from 26.4 million in 1980 to 54 million last year.

But the bubble of statistics is pricked by an inconvenient fact collected every year by the Registrar General of India's Sample Registration System. Since 1977 it has come up with one constant figure: 33 babies are born for every 1,000 people annually. (Last year, around 25 million babies were born).

In demographers' parlance, this figure is called the crude birth rate. But it is the most sensitive indicator of the success of the Government's family planning programme. If the programme was succeeding, the birth rate should have dropped dramatically. But for almost a decade, it hasn't budged a point.

Ashish Bose, a population expert and the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry's most scathing critic, says: "The success claimed by the Government actually shows only the progress of its expenditure. In its calculations, everything has to go up. Unfortunately, so has the population."

The country's rapidly multiplying numbers is the single biggest factor inhibiting speedier development. Every baby born costs the country Rs 16,000 to bring up. If one has to provide just basic education for the new citizens, 150 primary schools have to be set up a day. (Right now the figure is just 60).

The self-sufficiency attained in foodgrain production is being eaten away rapidly. The pace of population growth also means generating more jobs, more houses, and more hospitals if the majority has to cross the *Garibi Rekha*—the poverty line.

Ironically, India is the first country in the world to launch a

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family planning programme. Since 1951, when the programme was set up, the Government has tried everything to control the population—from cafeteria-like clinics selling contraceptives, to coercion during the Emergency. But as Pai Panandiker, director, Centre for Policy Research, wryly points out: "adjust in India seems to have no sex appeal."

When Rajiv Gandhi took the helm in 1984, a fleet of new programmes was launched. And new slogans coined. But four years later, there are no signs of a dramatic revolution. Instead, the ubiquitous inverted red triangle now symbolises the Government's impotence to check the population growth.

Yet, the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry, the godfather of the country's birth control programme, has hardly changed its tack. It continues to perpetuate several hoaxes about its family planning programme. Here are some of these:

HOAX 1

"Last year witnessed an all-time high record performance by registering over 20.5 million fresh acceptors in the family welfare programme. This has been possible through hard work, mobilisation of all resources and various new initiatives by the states and they deserve to be congratulated."

—First Conference of the Central Council of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, February 1988

The Truth: The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry is said to be afflicted with an acute case of targetitis. It is diagnosed as an excessive mania for figures and delusions of success.

At the Vehendo primary health centre (PHC), 60 km from Lucknow, Chotelal, 80, and his son Lakshman, 40, underwent vasectomy operations simultaneously recently. Both for the second time! While Chotelal couldn't remember when he had his first operation, Lakshman, a father of five, had his in 1976. They did it again for the money: Rs 180, which the Government pays to those vasectomised.

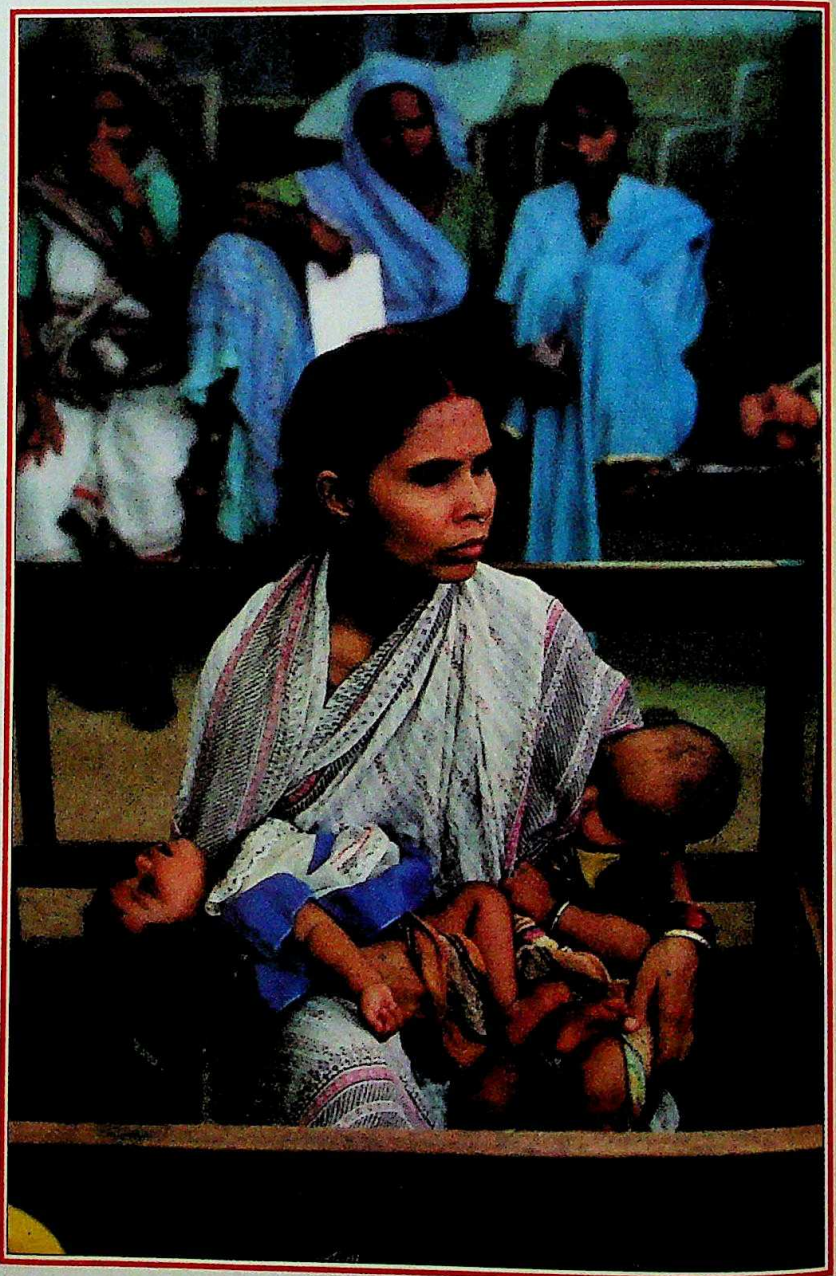
At the Kendur health centre, 50 km from Pune, a farce of another kind was being enacted. Mandaki Ramachandra, 35, underwent a tubectomy operation last month. She has five children—four girls and one boy—the youngest being a girl delivered just 21 days earlier.

At the national level, these three cases will be added to the Union Government's burgeoning list of "fresh acceptors" of contraceptive practices or, to use bureaucratic jargon, those 'protected against pregnancy.' Like the Ramachandras, three-fourths of the 'protected couples' are above 30 and most of them have four or more children. They have already done the damage demographically.

"It is like shutting the stable after the horse has bolted," says Professor K. Srinivasan, the bespectacled director of IIPS. The real indicator of success is the percentage of 'protected' couples in the prime reproductive age group of 15 to 29. That figure has remained stagnant at a poor 16 per cent.

Most of the Union Health Ministry claims are dubious. For instance, it claims that the percentage of couples protected against pregnancy has gone up from 22.8 in 1980 to 39.9 this year—a demographically significant rise of 17 per cent in eight years. Experts say such a dramatic increase should have resulted in a steep drop of five points in the country's birth rate. But since 1977, it has remained stationary at 33. As Dr Sivaswamy Srikantan of the Pune-based Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, points out: "The Government's couple protection

RAGHU RAI



A mother and two children: the spacing programme just hasn't worked

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rates look extremely suspicious. We may see the backlash soon."

Alarmed at the stubborn birth rate, Union Health Ministry officials appointed a special committee headed by Srinivasan. The committee noted in its review: "There is a fairly high and increasing proportion of ineligibile couples undergoing sterilisation who are reported as being within the reproductive span." Using revised techniques, the committee slashed the official couple protection rate by as much as 6 per cent. That means that as many as 80 lakh couples claimed to have been protected by the Health Ministry are really not.

CLAIM 2

THE HEALTH MINISTRY SAYS THAT ITS PROGRAMME TO PROMOTE SPACING OF CHILDREN HAS SUCCEEDED.

AN EXPERT GROUP HAS FOUND THE OFFICIAL FIGURES EXAGGERATED AND SLASHED THEM.

THE TRUTH

But the problem is just not that of fudged figures alone. Health officials now admit that the fundamental shift in the programme, from sterilisation, its mainstay, to spacing of children has not occurred. That is because the entire health system is still geared towards sterilisation. Workers find it easier to woo couples who have had all the children they want and then persuade them to be sterilised.

Moreover, the couples receive around Rs 200 for undergoing sterilisation and the motivator also gets some award. Spacing methods like condoms, IUD and pills require constant motivation, continuous follow-up and availability of contraceptives—something the present system doesn't support.

Even culturally, there is stiff resistance to spacing as well. For instance in villages, if a woman is not pregnant within the first year of marriage, she is looked down upon. And in a country where women shun social contact during periods, irregular bleedings—a common side-effect of IUD—are inconvenient. The pill is distrusted both by the people and doctors.

The policy of spacing doesn't succeed because there is hardly any backstopping method like abortion to check user failure. Abortions, despite their success in the West in birth control, have not caught on in India because of inadequate health facilities.

As Dr Rameshwar Sharma, director, Indian Institute of Health Management Research in Jaipur, says: "It may sound like a joke, but the country's best birth control measure has been breast-feeding. And no thanks to the Government."

But breast-feeding usually helps prevent pregnancy for a year. To make a dent on the birth rate, the spacing of pregnancies has to be over longer periods—best done by artificial contraceptive methods. Something that is still not happening in a big way.

HOAX 2

"The Government has recently initiated a deliberate policy to promote spacing methods on a large scale. Of late there has been a dramatic increase in the number of intra-uterine device (IUD) acceptors and a three-fold increase in pill users while the number of couples using condoms has shown an increasing trend."

—Government of India, International Conference on Population, Mexico, August 1984

The Truth: It was to be the Government's new thrust in the '80s. But on the ground, the massive programme to promote spacing methods has hardly taken off.

Listen to what P.L.Sharma (name has been changed), a health worker in Uttar Pradesh's Hardoi district, has to say: "Spacing? No health worker has the time or the interest to motivate couples. Our worry is how to complete the target in the register. All the paper work is done so perfectly that nobody can catch on that the figure is not true."

Sharma adds: "In my PHC, we have to hit a target of 600 IUD. Out of these, 400 are just buried in the ground. No one likes using Nirodh here—where do they hide the packet or where can they throw it after use? Everyone lives in a one-room house."

Unfortunately, the situation in Sharma's PHC isn't an exception. Repeated surveys have shown that far from preventing births, the spacing programme has only resulted in inflating family planning figures.

The fudging is helped along by the difficulty in checking. For instance, an arbitrary figure of 72 condoms distributed by a health worker is calculated as one more couple being protected. And as Bose points out: "You can't be hiding in their bedrooms and finding out whether the condom is being used."

Studies have shown too that women having IUD insertions hardly ever retain them for as long as six months. Even the Government's expert committee remarked: "There appears to be a high degree of over-reporting of cases with regard to IUD insertions and distribution of oral pills and condoms."

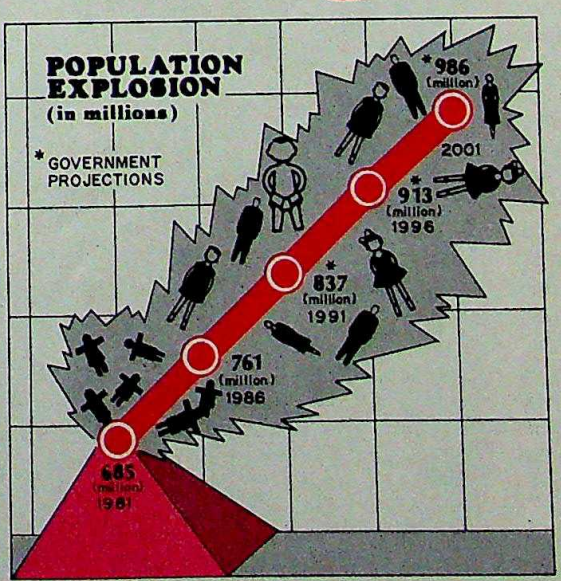

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

HOAX 3

"Beti ho ya Bete. Bachhe Do He Achhe (Boy or Girl. Two is best)."

—Family planning slogan

The Truth: There can be no statement as naive as this in a country where having a son is like fulfilling a *dharma*. People, as one expert says, have their own minimum needs programme: two sons.

Datta Raj, a father of three girls and a boy in Maharashtra's Pimpale Jagtap village, explains: "I need two sons. Otherwise who will light my pyre, who will carry on the family name, who will help me on the fields, who will look after me in my old age?" A recently married Bajirao Sadashiv, when asked what if his wife did not give birth to any sons, said nonchalantly: "I will marry again."

The reactions are startlingly similar across the country. In Rajasthan, Chand Mal Jain in Phagi, about 70 km from Jaipur, says: "Sons are like our eyes. Without them we can't see." In his quest for a

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son, R.L.Varma of Sandila taluk in Uttar Pradesh has had six daughters. And he says firmly: "I will not stop till I have a son."

Health officials admit that women too are equally keen on having sons. Bose says: "You are dealing with a demographic fundamentalism. People are fanatical about having two living sons. It is as sacred as religion to them."

More importantly, the small family norm has not caught on because so far the whole programme has been geared towards acheiving a demographic and statistical goal. The Government refuses to recognise individual needs for children.

In Rajasthan, Ramswarup Sharma, at 30 a father of four, says simply: "I need five children. One to look after my goats. One to look after my cows. Another to tend to my sheep. One to help me on the field. And one to help my wife at home." Sharma, in a way, points out several reasons as to why most Indians want more than two children.

"People are not breeding like rabbits," says Shireen Jejeebhoy, director of research, Family Planning Association of India in Bombay. "They have a rationale behind them. They still don't see how having less children would help them. For them sons are like old age pensions, more children mean more hands to work and earn. Does the Government offer any alternatives?" So far, it has not.

cent, against the all India figure of 25. And the age at which women get married is also the lowest in the country.

Frighteningly, these four states account for 38 per cent of India's population. Their poor showing continues to negate much of the progress achieved elsewhere. States like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Punjab are the front runners of family planning. Their birth rates are well below the national average of 33 with Kerala's being the lowest—22.4.

The programme in Kerala succeeded primarily because of the high rate of literacy among women, excellent health facilities and women marrying late. Instead of stressing these factors, the *Bimaru* states exhibit a blind obsession for meeting family planning targets.

Most states, in fact, fall into the same trap. The country's giant family planning programme is set into motion every March with the Union Health Ministry setting state-wise targets. In a pass-the-buck phenomenon the state health directors call the 650 district health officers (DHOs) and farm out the targets.

The DHOs then chalk out annual targets for the primary health centres and sub-centres in their jurisdiction. (There are 15,050 such PHCs and 98,987 sub-centres). On an average each centre in, say Lucknow district, would have to get 600 people sterilised, insert 500 IUD and distribute 50,000 condoms.

HOAX 4

"Uttar Pradesh has been regularly winning awards for exceeding its targets in family planning. We have achieved more than we have ever done before."

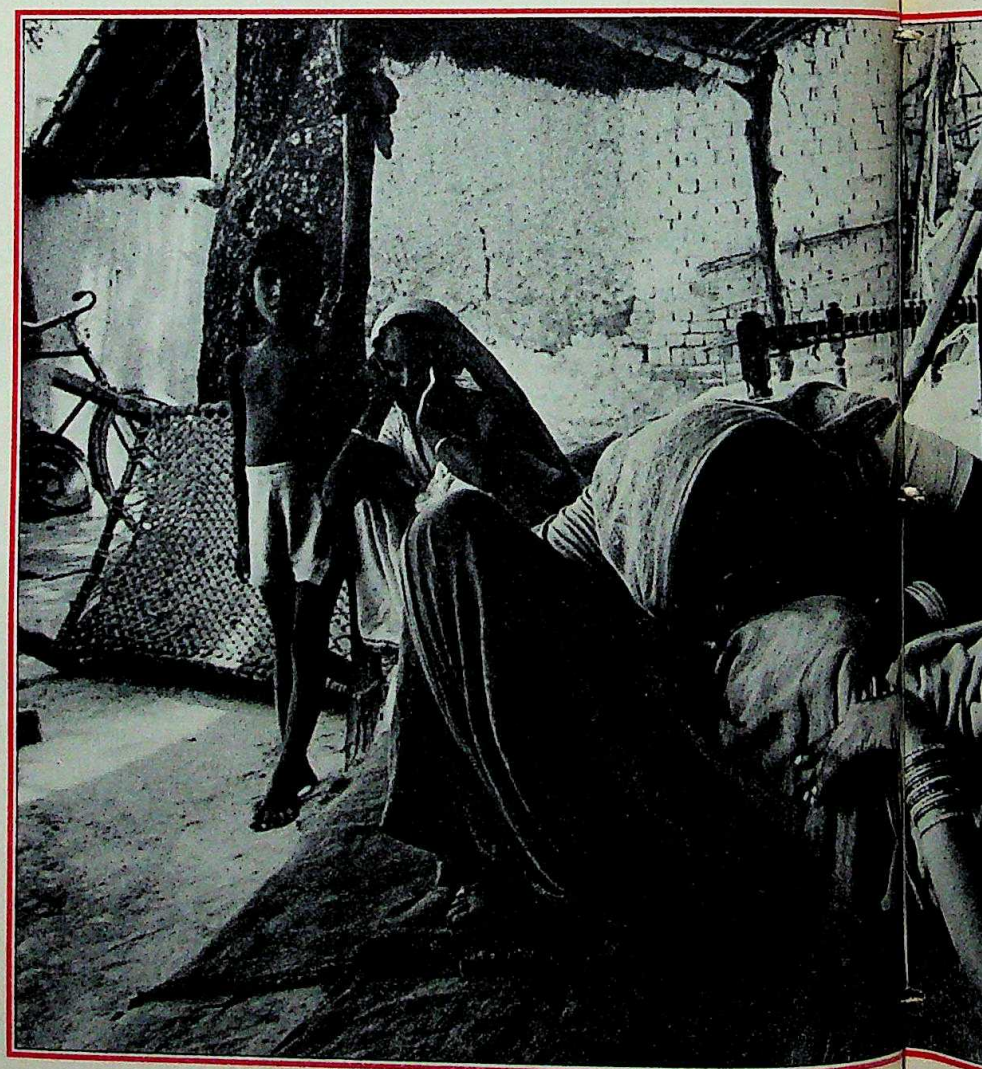
—An Uttar Pradesh health official

The Truth: It is a farce that is enacted every year at the annual meeting in New Delhi of all state family welfare ministries to review their progress. As the health ministers and secretaries gather, the annual awards for achieving family planning targets are distributed. First prize, Uttar Pradesh, 115 per cent. Clap. Clap. Second prize, Rajasthan, 95 per cent. More claps. Till the entire charade is over.

What is never pointed out is that Uttar Pradesh gets the prize only because it is grouped along with such poor performing states as Bihar and Rajasthan. In fact, the four states—Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan—are among the worst performers in the country.

Using their first letters, Bose has coined a new acronym for these four states: *Bimaru* (sick). The birth rate in these states has hovered around 39 and 38 per 1,000 for the past six years—five points higher than the national average.

Worse, the infant mortality rates in the rural areas of these states are some of the highest, with Uttar Pradesh topping at 154 per 1,000 (the national average in rural areas is 107). Female literacy is extremely low—between 11 and 15 per



A village midwife checks a pregnant woman: abysmal rural health services

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CLAIM 3

UTTAR PRADESH WON THE FIRST PRIZE FOR ITS HIGH FAMILY PLANNING PERFORMANCE LAST YEAR.

THAT'S BECAUSE IT IS GROUPED WITH POOR PERFORMING STATES AS BIHAR AND RAJASTHAN.

THE TRUTH

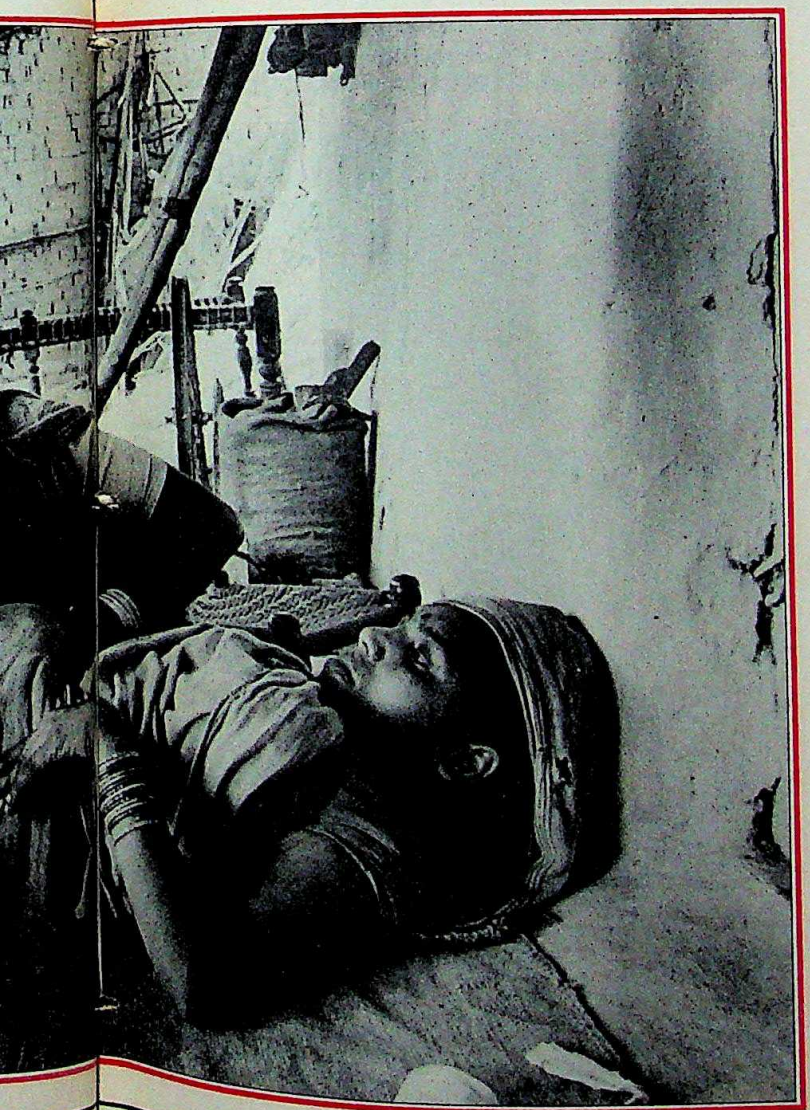
The work is further divided. The 45,000 medical officers in charge of the PHCs fix individual targets for the 17,050 lady health visitors, the 1.03 lakh auxiliary nurse midwives and the 3.93 lakh village health guides that man the centres.

The result of this mammoth operation in many states is usually counterproductive. In Mohanlalganj near Lucknow, a doctor says: "We concentrate on meeting these targets and neglect all other health care." Adds another: "Any couple will do. Even those with one foot in their graves."

Targets are met by organising mass family planning camps. Just after the monsoons, jeeps go out playing songs, beating drums and announcing cash incentives to people to come for sterilisation. The frequency intensifies as March, the year-end, approaches. Free blankets or transistors are thrown in as added incentives. Brash promises of allotting sites to young acceptors are made (and rarely fulfilled).

The result is that most districts bloat their figures with a large number of ineligible couples (those having four or more children). Worse, repeated Central health intelligence reports have shown that in most states, around 14 to 20 per cent of the acceptors in all age groups can't be traced—either "no such person exists" or the address is "wrong and incomplete".

As Dr Bhasker Mishra, director of Lucknow's Population Research Centre, says: "Most of the states treat family planning like their malaria programme. They spray contraceptives around like DDT. And no dent is made on the population."



HOAX 5

"The scope and coverage of the Maternal and Child Care Programme has expanded considerably. Efforts towards immunisation etc aim at bringing down infant and maternal mortality rates."

—Family Welfare Ministry Booklet, 1988

The Truth: The first twinge of pain came at four in the morning. Rani continued making *parathas* for her husband. He left as usual to work on his fields in Sasandi near Lucknow.

When the pain became unbearable, Mayadevi, the *dai* (traditional midwife) in the village, was called. Her instruments were simple: a shaving blade to cut the umbilical cord, an old cloth dipped in hot water to wash the baby and some ash to act as an antiseptic. The delivery was smooth. It was a girl.

Despite states boasting of a "dramatic improvement" in maternal health services, almost nine out of 10 babies in villages are still delivered by *dais* at home as in Rani's case. And if Mayadevi used a blade to cut the umbilicus, others just use a kitchen knife or simply a scythe. Instead of twine, they tie the navel with a ribbon.

Better maternal and child care is crucial. People usually have more children because they are not sure that half of them will survive. Recognising this the Government launched several programmes to improve maternal and child health. These include a major programme to monitor and treat pregnant women, provide labour wards and immunise children.

But how bad the maternal and child health services really are was revealed by a survey done by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in five states. The survey found that government midwives rarely monitored pregnancies—they helped perform hardly 10 per cent of the deliveries.

Mortality because of tetanus and anaemia (iron deficiency) is a major threat. Yet only 30 per cent of the women surveyed were getting tetanus toxide injections and hardly a fifth, iron tablets distributed by the Government.

And infant mortality rates continue to be high. One out of 10 children born, dies within the first year. Half of them in the first month itself: tetanus, diarrhoea, diphtheria, whooping cough, all taking their share. Although in 1985, a massive programme to immunise all children by 1990 was launched, hardly 25 per cent of them have been covered so far.

There are daunting problems. Reaching vaccines to distant places means keeping refrigerators in PHCs. In most centres, however, power is available only for a few hours. Added to it, refrigerators frequently break down. And if polio and DPT vaccines are not kept frozen, they become ineffective.

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The success of the maternal and child health programme depends largely on the auxiliary nurse midwife or ANMs as they are called. They are entrusted with the task of caring for pregnant women, conducting deliveries and seeing that children are immunised. But they are the least paid, poorly trained and neglected lot of the health system.

Typically, Pushpa Sisodia, who is in charge of the Bichi sub-centre in Rajasthan, has to cover 12 villages eight to 10 km apart. If she has to do her work effectively, she must carry a weighing machine, measuring tape, foetuscope and equipment for testing blood. Sisodia naturally finds it easier to wait for pregnant women to visit her—only one out of five does.

There are other problems as well. Most ANMs prefer to stay in the big town or city nearby and commute to their work place every day. Coming from urban backgrounds, they are looked upon by the village folk with suspicion. And they are hardly available for consultation. Any case of foetal distress during pregnancy in villages usually results in the death of the child.

There was a move to train *dais* and give them simple and cheap delivery kits, but the programme is yet to be implemented seriously. As Dr Rameshwar Sharma says: "On paper, the health care system looks impressive. On the ground it doesn't work." And Badri Saxena, ICMR's deputy director-general, adds: "I think we have almost missed the bus for comprehensive maternal and child care in the country."

HOAX 6

"Special attention will be paid to the education and employment of women and to liberate them from the dependence and insecurity and improve their social status."

—Sixth Five-Year Plan Document, 1980

The Truth: Prabha Sadashiv,24, of Koregaon Bhima village in Maharashtra is an unusual woman. She resisted pressure from her parents to get married at 16 and preferred to finish her commerce degree. At 22 she married a mill supervisor.

Soon after her son was born last year she voluntarily went to the nearest health centre and asked them to insert an IUD. And she says: "I want only two children. I can bring them up well. And I am going to take up work in a bank soon."

Sadashiv is a good example of how women's education influences such diverse factors as age of marriage and the number of children a couple would have. In Rajasthan, for instance, harldy 6.4 per cent of the women are educated. And the average age at which women get married is a low 16.1.

Despite tall promises by the Government about raising the status of Indian women, very little has been done. Getting parents to delay their daughters' marriages is a difficult proposition as health officials have realised. Even now a majority of the women are married before the statutory minimum age of 18.

To compound the problem, sociologists now notice a marriage squeeze caused by an excess of brides. There are now 1,168 women for every 1,000 men in their respective potential marriage age groups. One social worker in Pune was bluntly told by a farmer: "Listen, are you going to get me a groom if I delay my daughter's marriage?."

It works like an ever-expanding vicious cycle. Parents are unwilling to send their daughters beyond secondary school and deter them from seeking employment. Also, dowry is much lower for daughters who are younger. The early marriages have led to India having one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the world.

Improving women's employment opportunity is a way out. But the situation is still pathetic. The overall unemployment among females is a staggering 80 per cent. A decision taken during the seventh plan period to progressively allot as much as 30 per cent of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) loans to women has helped improve the situation. But this is only a dull glow in a large area of darkness.

HOAX 7

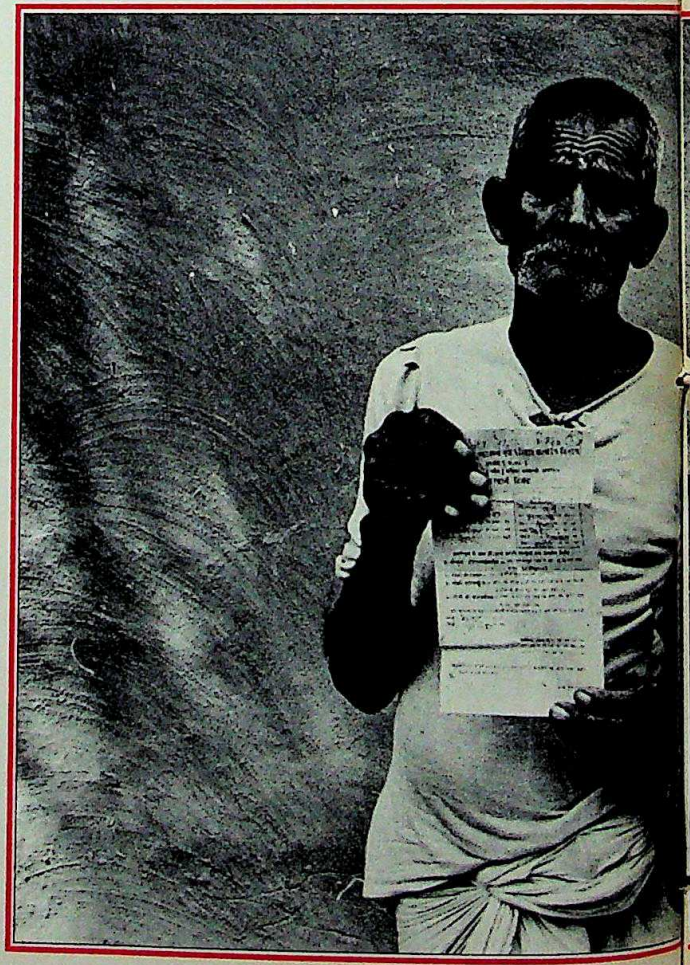
"There must be a total political commitment to the family planning programme by representatives of the people at all levels."

—Declaration of the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, New Delhi, 1981

The Truth: "Talking about family planning is like singing the requiem at a wedding party," says an MP. Ever since the Sanjay overkill and its disastrous impact, politicians have been shying away from the subject. And the dismal population scenario is largely a result of a lack of political commitment.

Much of the problem is as another MP, who doesn't want to be named, explains: "If I provide a tap or health centre, I could win votes. But if people themselves don't want to adopt family planning and I force them, then I'm finished."

The Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population, formed seven years ago, itself has made little headway. It got seven legislative assemblies to pass pious but ineffective declara-



In Uttar Pradesh, Chotelal, 80, and son Lakshman, 40, underwent vasectomy operations for the second time: a farce

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tions of their commitment to the "small family norm." The association launched population projects in 10 parliamentary constituencies in six states.

Nothing much followed after that. Says Sat Paul Mittal, the association's chairman: "MPs just drop the subject like a hot potato. And the Government is implementing the programme half-heartedly. If Rajiv Gandhi with his massive mandate can't take tough measures, then no one can."

Attempts by the Government to take the "hard options" have rarely succeeded. There was a suggestion to give less money or even banning loans under the IRDP scheme to those with big families. But as Inderjit Khanna, joint secretary, Rural Development Ministry points out: "Usually the poorer the person, the bigger the size of his family. They are the ones that really need the money and how can we cut them off? We would never be able to get rid of poverty."

There was also a move to involve the country's 94,000 agricultural co-operatives in educational and motivational work in family planning. A meeting of the heads of co-operatives was convened and an Agricultural Department official reports: "Everybody listened, nodded their heads and forgot about it. There has been no follow-up."

The problem is that India can't do a China. China achieved dramatic results by insisting on a single child norm and imposing heavy disincentives for those who violated it. But Srinivasan thinks that "politicians who go to polls every five years can't be relied upon to find the will to implement hard decisions."

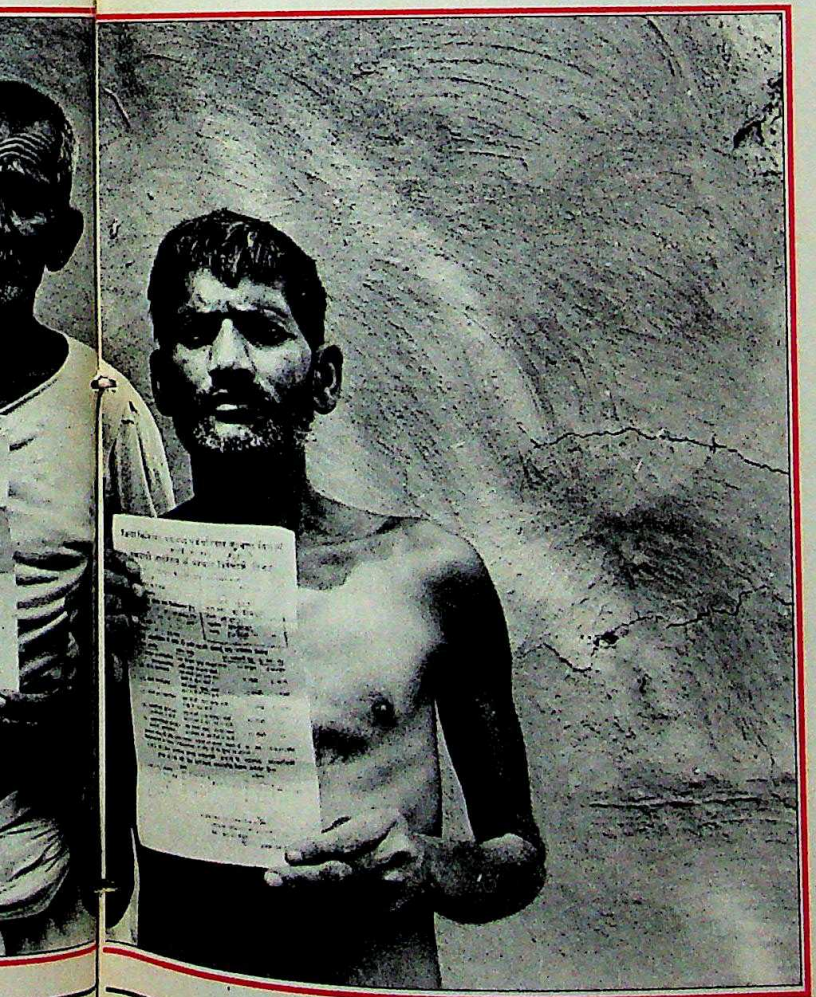
Even the new Union Health Minister Motilal Vora admits: "Any kind of tough measure won't pay at all in the long-run. What would really work well is persuasion and education."

CLAIM 4

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS IT IS PLANNING TO INTRODUCE DISINCENTIVES FOR THOSE WITH LARGE FAMILIES.

THE TRUTH

IT DOESN'T HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL TO INTRODUCE SEVERAL OF ITS PLANNED TOUGH MEASURES.



HOAX 8

"We should reach a birth rate of 29.1 per 1,000 by 1990 and 21 by 2001.
—Seventh Five-Year Plan Document, 1985

The Truth: The furrows across the forehead of P.K.Umashankar, who was the Union Health Ministry's special secretary till last fortnight, are as straight as the stagnant birth rate. "We always believed that the demographic pressure can be managed," says Umashankar; "but as a matter of fact, it hasn't been managed. Every single projection of ours has been thrown totally overboard."

Officials openly now admit that achieving the birth rate of 29 per 1,000 by 1990 is almost impossible. To stabilise India's population, the Government needs to decelerate the birth rate to 21 by 2001. But this too has become a distant dream.

Umashankar was a refreshing change in a ministry known to be cagey and cautious about its failures. For him, what is more important is not deflecting criticism, but defining the problem. As he says: "For too long family planning has been the Health Ministry's baby. It's time everyone got into the act."

His view is widely echoed by most population control experts. In Pune, Dr Banoo Coyaji, chairman, KEM Research Hospital and a veteran family planning expert, says: "Our basic mistake is that we rely on health workers to deliver the goods. We should realise that there is no technological fix for birth control."

Much of the problem is the excessive bureaucratic content of the programme. With targets being fixed by the Centre, the states tend to shirk responsibility. As Motilal Vora says: "It has led to a perception that the programme is of the Centre, by the Centre and for the Centre." Only now is there a move to involve the states in fixing more rational targets.

Meanwhile, there are worrying indicators that the birth rate may even rise if nothing is done. One of the factors is the breakdown of traditional practices such as abstinence after pregnancy and prolonged breast-feeding—natural inhibitors of fertility in the past.

Demographers have also been finding that the baby boomers of the '60s and '70s are now entering the prime reproductive age of 15 to 29. By 1990, it is estimated that there would be 250 million people knocking on the doors of marriage. Says Harish Khanna, executive director of the Tata-funded Family Planning Foundation: "There seems to be a second baby boom around the corner and it would push up the population even faster."

With sterilisation still the mainstay of the family planning programme, the new mass of couples have no motivation to reduce their fertility. But as S.K.Alok, joint secretary in the Union

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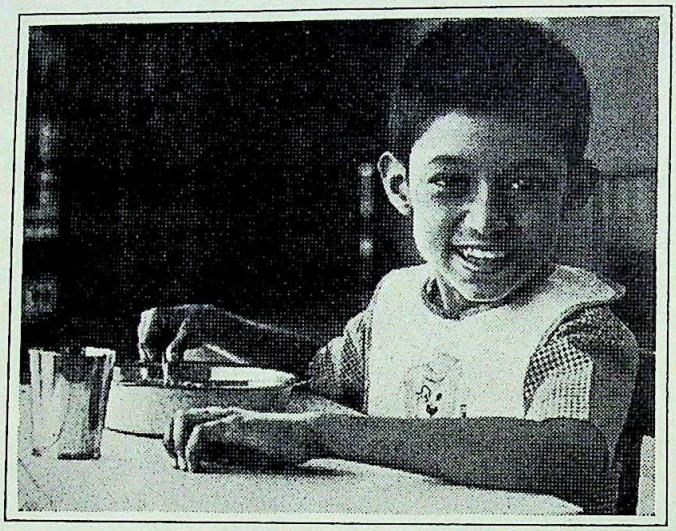
Last year he learned how to hold a glass.

This year he's tying his own shoelaces...



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Health Ministry, says: "The tragedy is that prolific breeding is not a disease. Children are not an epidemic. An outbreak of population doesn't hurt anybody immediately. With the result that no one really cares."

Can India still control her population or is it too late ?

Industrialist J.R.D. Tata's solution is simple. Says he: "We must make population control a national concern. Our priority number one." All agree with him, but are split down the middle over how the problem should be tackled.

CLAIM 5

THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S PROJECTION IS THAT INDIA'S POPULATION WILL STABILIZE BY 2001.

EVEN SENIOR HEALTH MINISTRY OFFICIALS ADMIT THAT THIS IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY.

THE TRUTH

Many experts believe that India's development is the best contraceptive. They argue that when India shifts from a predominantly agricultural economy (which favours more working hands at home) to an industrialised society, there will be an automatic drop in birth rates.

Panandiker, who subscribes to the development view, says: "The hope lies with the rapidly growing middle class. They would force the pace of economic growth and change the demographic pattern."

But Umashankar, along with a sizeable section of experts, disagrees. Says he firmly: "One cannot believe in the litany of development being the best contraceptive. The question is not whether we have options but whether we can wait any longer in implementing them. We have to play God but soberly."

His solution: A more honest implementation of the programme coupled with hefty government incentives for those having small families could be the answer.

Meanwhile, there is a growing feeling that everything should not be, as ICMR's Badri Saxena puts it, "done by Bharat *Sarkar*." For too long the bureaucratic obsession with targets has led to a mechanical implementation of what should have been essentially a human programme.

Many feel that the Government's goal should not be reducing the birth rate, but making safe and effective family planning methods accessible to all couples. Apart from decentralising targets so that states could have a say in the programme, it should also concentrate on providing excellent health services.

Others want voluntary organisations across the country to play a big role in implementing the programme. Many of the PHCs could, in fact, be run by such organisations.

Also, the services of the village *dais* and traditional doctors are largely untapped. Training them and making them important conduits of the family planning programme would help a great deal.

Some feel that the unemployment angle should be stressed. Bose says: "People understand unemployment better than wooly Victorian ideals of health and happiness."

A dampening factor for the more-than-one-son craze is as Jagtap, a farmer in Pune, says: "Land can't stretch like rubber, I know. When I divide it among my sons each of them would get so little."

Crucially, instead of paying lip-service to women's literacy and employment, serious steps must be taken to make them a reality, especially in the *Bimaru* states. The suggestion to run training camps for young women and help them develop skills should be implemented seriously.

The reactivation of the Mahila Mandals in many villages would strengthen the movement. And voluntary agencies can play a significant role in speeding up this process.

In short, population control should be everyone's baby. But at the moment, the gap between programmes and implementation is only widening and if nothing is done quickly enough, the *Guinness Book of World Records* in Rajiv's 21st century may read like this:

Most populous country
India. 1.2 billion. One out of five persons in the world is an Indian. Every second a baby is born. Every day: 86,400.

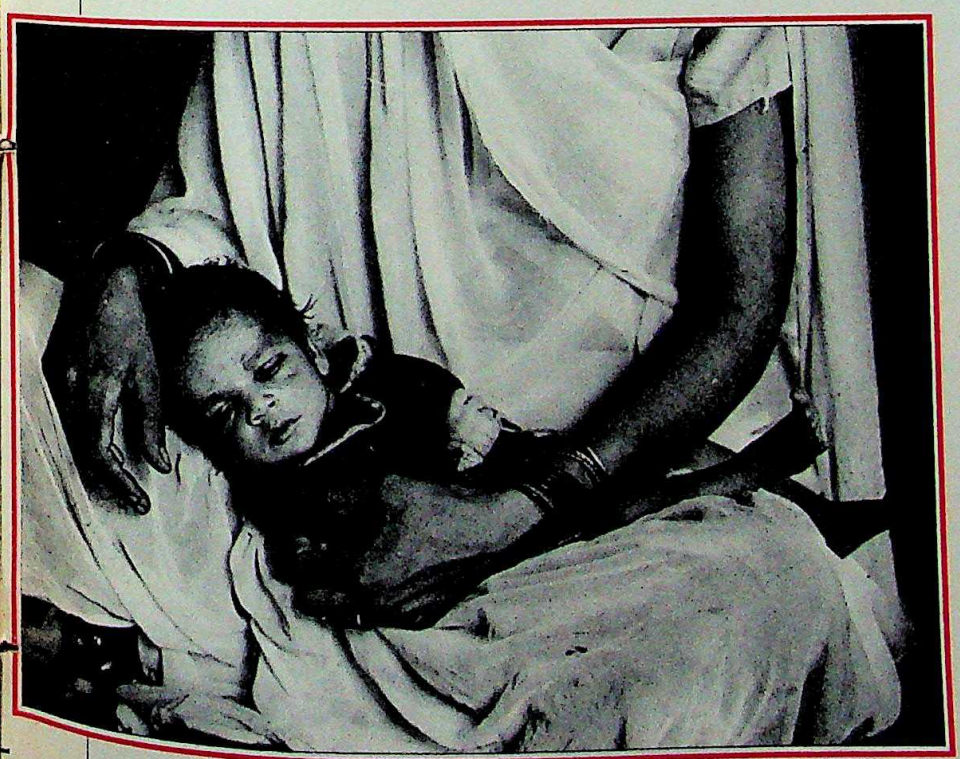
Poorest country
India. Average per capita income: Rs 6000.

Largest number of illiterates
India: 600 million.

Largest unemployed
India: 400 million.

Largest homeless
India: 600 million.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra



A new-born baby: rapidly multiplying numbers

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SALMAN RUSHDIE

Political Scapegoat

A volley of protest followed last fortnight after the Government succumbed to pressure to ban Salman Rushdie's latest novel. Senior Correspondent DAVID DEVADAS *examines the fury and the storm.*

BANNED. The word dropped like a bombshell last fortnight, sending shock waves pulsing through literary circles and the liberal world at large. Import of Salman Rushdie's latest novel *The Satanic Verses* had been banned. The Government had given in to pressure from Muslim leaders who argued that the book vilified their religion. Appalled, Rushdie said: "India is rapidly forfeiting its right to be called a democracy."

India has rarely banned books in the past, generally preferring to stall them with red tape at customs. Among controversial books that have passed that way are Arthur Koestler's *Lotus and the Robot*, which derided Gandhi, V.S. Naipaul's *India: A Wounded Civilisation*, Aubrey Menon's *Rama Retold* and Ved Mehta's *Mahatma Gandhi and his Apostles*.

Cartoon by MANJULA PADMANABHAN

But things are obviously changing. While some of these books caused a rumpus in Parliament and others like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were finally banned by courts, this time the Government pre-empted all discussion. Rushdie's book was only published at the end of September. INDIA TODAY had reviewed it (September 15, 1988), pointing out obvious parallels between sequences of the novel and incidents from the life and times of the Prophet Mohammed.

INTERVIEW

"It's political football"

ANGRY and hurt, Salman Rushdie spoke on the telephone from London to Principal Correspondent MADHU JAIN. *Excerpts:*

Q. *What will you do about the ban?*

A. I've written an open letter to Rajiv telling him it's sad if the Ministry of Finance decides what books are to be read. If he makes a reversal, I would be the first to applaud him. If he doesn't, it's clear this is in line with other kinds of repression taking place.

Q. *Is being read in India important to you?*

A. India has been important in all my work. Parts of *The Satanic Verses* have to do with my adult relationship with India. I'm very disappointed that the book isn't going to be read there because the Indian reader would have been able to appreciate it more than anyone else... What is alarming is the Islamic fundamentalist bandwagon rolling against the book. Thanks to Shahabuddin, various Muslim organisations are meeting in England to coordinate their attack. Certain passages have been circulated. Is this a way of judging literature?

Q. *Did you expect such a reaction?*

A. Not of this force. It's ridiculous. A journalist asks me if I had portrayed god as a bald man with dandruff. I can't answer questions like that.

Q. *Will you come to India?*

A. I see no reason for going where my book is banned. I take it as a personal hurt. If India treats its writers like this, it will end up with no writers. I feel that I'm personally being banned. This is about votes, not literature. I resent my book being used as political football.

Q. *Isn't the book very personal?*

A. The fuss about one or two passages is a distortion. My book is largely about migration to the West. It's primarily comic in tone and is the most personal thing I've written...The world isn't interested in literature; it's interested in politics. I'll never write about India again.

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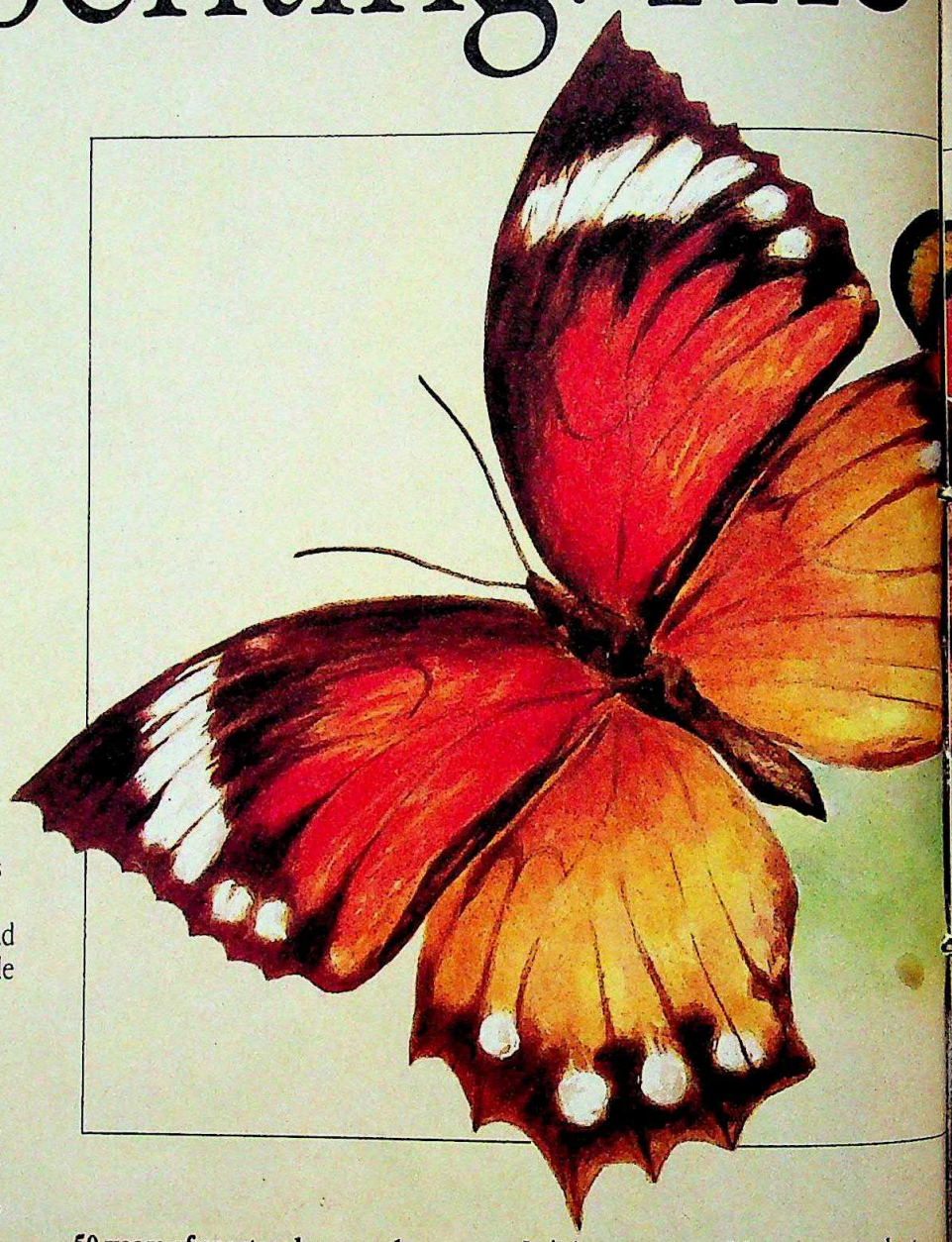
Presenting. The 1



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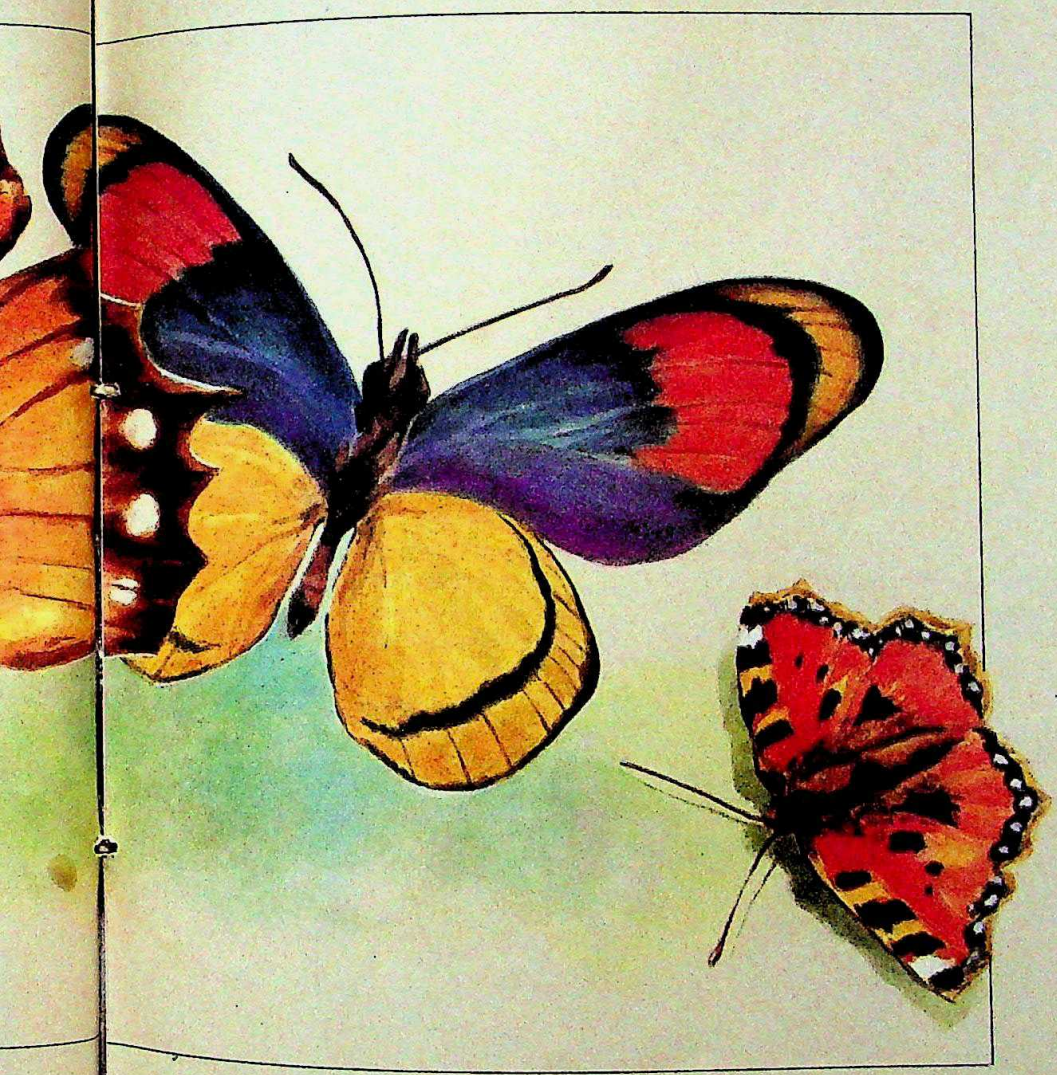

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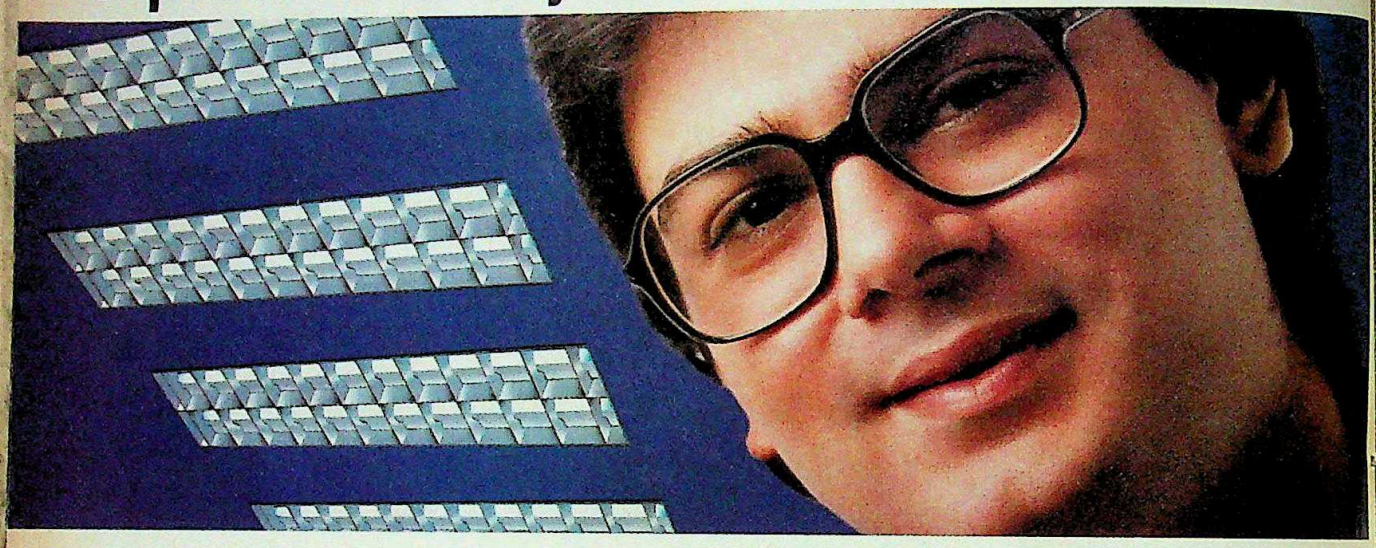
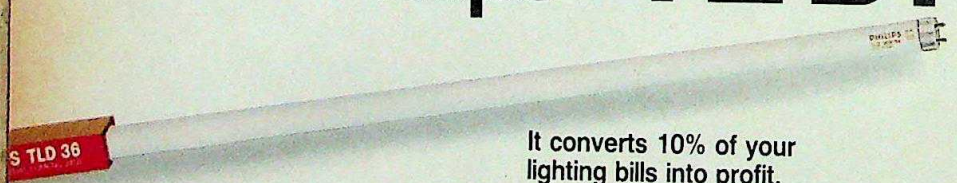


Philips 'TL'D.



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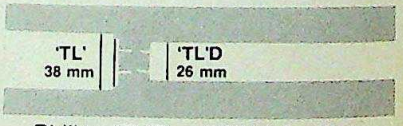

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The book uses allegorical dreams and historical metaphor to examine the thin line between good and evil, dogmatism and distortions in perception.

The reaction was irate. Calling it "a deliberate insult to Islam and the holy prophet and an intentional device to outrage religious feelings", Janata MP Syed Shahabuddin held that it was "not an act of literary creativity". He said "you just have to read it" to know that, but added that he had not.

"It is a deliberate insult to the holy prophet and an intentional device to outrage religious feelings."
SYED SHAHABUDDIN
member of Parliament

Not everyone was as unreasonable. There were those who argued cogently that the book acutely hurt their sensibilities. Congress(I) MP Khurshid Alam Khan meticulously marked objectionable parts. "I agree with freedom of expression but that does not mean that you hurt somebody's feelings," he said. In the tense communal mood prevailing, it could have ignited passions. Already, he noted, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh's *Organiser* had excerpted offensive portions and the Urdu daily *Nai Duniya* had responded angrily.

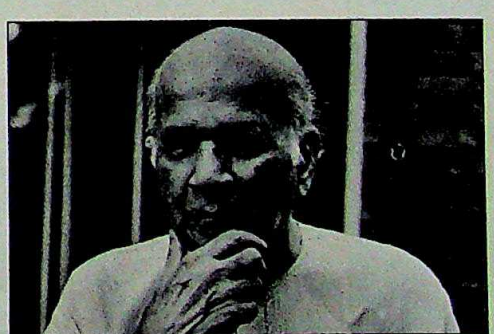
Though their reasons differed, a variety of Muslim leaders got together in late September to have the book banned. Visiting the Home Ministry every second day, the group met Home Minister Buta Singh and Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram. Normally, such decisions take much longer but the ministry moved fast to placate these men.

The timing was crucial. Buta Singh has been trying to persuade some of them to call off a threatened march to Ayodhya over the controversial Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi shrine. Also, elections are not too far and the 'Muslim vote' is crucial. The delegation included a variety of Muslim politicians, ranging from the Indian Union Muslim League's Sulaiman Sait to the Congress(I)'s Khan.

If by placating them the ruling party shored up its electoral prospects, it lost points among the liberal intelligentsia in the bargain. Senior Advocate Soli Sorabjee called it "yet another surrender to forces of fundamentalism and intolerance". He promptly offered to fight it in court for the publishers, Penguin Books.

Veteran diplomat Badruddin Tyabji waxed eloquent. "It seems suspiciously like a *coup de theatre* in a comedy played by a group of deaf actors under the direction of a blind director. The blind have not read the script and the deaf only understand the sign language of the election-hustings." He added that the consequences were likely to be "exactly the contrary of what they proclaim". Clearly, pirated editions will flourish and many more will read it than would normally have. Already, the owner of a copy in Delhi was "getting five calls a day from people who want to read it".

The worst part of this prurient interest, as Tyabji points out, is that "the allegedly offending chapters in the book will be torn out of context and devoured by hordes of babu-English illiterates, who would otherwise have contentedly confined their reading to the daily newspaper headlines. And the less they are capable of understanding the purport and thrust of the whole book, the more agitated they will become". Sorabjee added that the Supreme Court had ruled during the controversy over *Tamas* that a book "has to be judged as a whole and not by separate sentences and the effect has to be judged with reference to a rational and level-headed person, not on a hypersensitive or volatile mind".



"The less they can understand the thrust of the book; the more agitated they will become."
BADRUDDIN TYABJI
veteran diplomat

Faced with such condemnation, politicians found themselves without a fig-leaf. They could neither admit to the 'vote bank' pressures nor defend their decision any other way. The only party to condemn the ban—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—has no Muslim votes to lose anyway. Responded Khurshid Alam Khan: "What interest does the BJP have in it?" If other secular parties kept mute, the ruling party was jittery too. "Please talk to the home secretary," said a nervous Chidambaram repeatedly, finally putting down the phone when pressed for the Government's reasons.

The Government is on slippery ground. This, after all, is a work of art which uses metaphors from Islamic lore to discuss larger themes. Nor is religion the only theme. Rushdie also felt the ire of English tabloids, incensed at his acid critique of racism in Thatcherite Britain.

Like his earlier best sellers *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, this book has evoked mixed reactions. Tyabji, for example, was not entirely impressed. "Its writing has in turn attracted and repulsed me; elicited laughter as well as evoked pain and acute discomfort," he said. Many agreed that the work may be bad but a ban could not be justified. Said noted writer Aubrey Menon: "India has to react against the libels which Rushdie was publishing one after the other. But this was quite the wrong way."

Not all supporters of free speech unequivocally opposed the ban though. The very real danger of riots weighed heavily with them. Cartoonist Abu Abraham, himself an atheist, said: "We haven't reached a stage when people can take such things." Just two years ago, a mob attacked the Bangalore office of *The Deccan Herald* because a short story headline was considered offensive.

O.V. Vijayan, well-known Malayalam writer, shook his head sadly: "I would prefer the ban to the Bangalore type of riots. But that raises the question—aren't we a barbarian society still?" That question must surely agitate all Indians interested in the free flow of ideas as fundamentalism of various hues gets steadily stronger.—DAVID DEVADAS

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SMUGGLING

The Gold Rush

All through the past six months, law enforcement agencies have been making record seizures of gold. Government sources claim that larger and larger quantities of the precious metal are being smuggled into India because the smugglers have found a way to pay for their gold purchases—with narcotics money. Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA *analyses the new trend and its implications.*

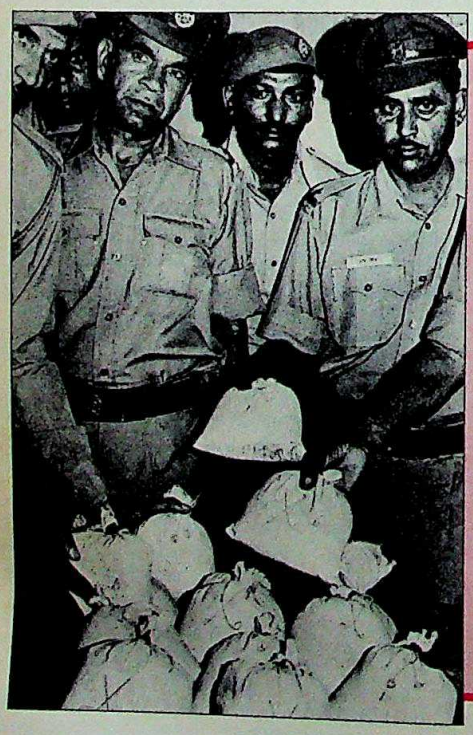
GOLD smuggling into the country has just about gone through the roof. In record-breaking confiscations, law enforcement agencies have been seizing some 3 kg of gold, valued at Rs 10 lakh, every single day for the last six months. These recoveries have coincided with a period in which the price of the precious metal in India has shot up to Rs 320 per gram compared to the average world price of Rs 200.

In the last nine months, officials have captured over 3,900 kg of gold valued at Rs 130 crore. During all of last year, the recovery by the various revenue intelligence agencies was about 2,255 kg. Gold traders believe that the record seizures are not only because of the premium prices in India but also due to the more sophisticated detection methods as well as the speedy implementation of the incentive scheme for law officers. An official who has recovered smuggled gold now receives 20 per cent of its market value as cash reward. Some Rs 15 lakhs have been paid under this scheme—introduced by V.P. Singh when he was finance minister.

But there may be an even more important reason why larger and larger quantities of smuggled gold are finding their way into India. The smugglers have found a way to pay for gold purchases—with narcotics money. It is precisely this link between gold and narcotics that is giving law enforcement officials a headache. Confidential government documents prove the growing link between gold smuggling and the international narcotics trade—dominated by some of the most powerful and violent crime syndicates in the world. The Government, according to these documents, has finally been able to establish that the gold purchases abroad which are smuggled into the country are paid for, to a large extent, by profits made from smuggling drugs out of India.

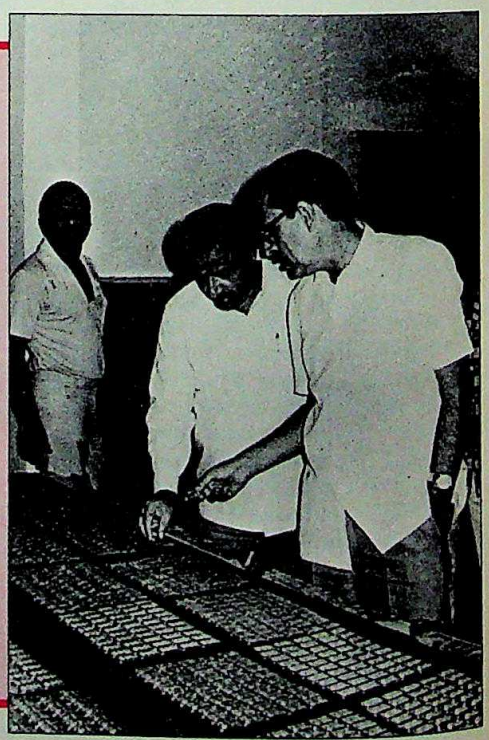
Gold, considered an invaluable hedge against inflation all over the world, seems doubly dear in India not only because of its traditional use in ceremonial affairs, but

Policemen with packets of hashish



ACCORDING TO CONFIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS, GOLD SMUGGLING INTO INDIA HAS SHOT UP BECAUSE IT IS NOW INGENIOUSLY FINANCED THROUGH THE ILLICIT TRADE IN HASHISH AND HEROIN.

Officials survey their gold seizures



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also because the country produces so little of it. Consider this: the domestic production of gold is under two tonnes a year—less than half of the contraband gold confiscated from smugglers by the authorities this year. And Finance Ministry officials believe that over 150 tonnes of gold found its way into the country illegally in a year's period.

The smuggling is no longer confined to the traditional sea and air routes or restricted to major centres like Bombay and Gujarat. Customs and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) sleuths have been busting gold smugglers' gangs all over the country—from the deserts of Rajasthan to the verdant fields of Punjab. Gold has been recovered from hiding places such as aircraft toilets, tractors and petrol tanks. Says B.V.Kumar, member (anti-smuggling) of the Central Board of Excise & Customs: "India is becoming the major market for unloading gold by the syndicates who are also smuggling drugs."

The number and quantity of drug seizures have also shown a corresponding increase. As against 139 kg of heroin seized during 1983, DRI officials captured over 2,000 kg this year (*see chart*). Over 15,000 kg of hashish had already been confiscated by the authorities this year against 6,073 kg five years ago. And the major route for both gold and drug smuggling continues to be Afghanistan, Pakistan, Punjab and London. Three out of 10 cases of both drug and gold smuggling detected in India this year involve a Pakistani national or a resident of Punjab.

According to a secret report prepared by Indian intelligence agencies in collaboration with their foreign counterparts, at least three crime syndicates are the major dealers in the illicit drug and gold traffic—of which India has become the focal point. They are headed by Haji Ashraf, a Pakistani national. Dawood Ibrahim Shiekh, a former Bombay don now settled in Dubai and Haji Yakoob Abdullah, another Indian.

Evidence of the gold-drug nexus surfaced in 1982 when narcotics began to arrive in India in increasing quantities. Before that, even the US Drug Enforcement Administration—which monitors the drug network globally—had noted in a report that India was among a handful of countries that had effectively controlled the drug trade within its borders.

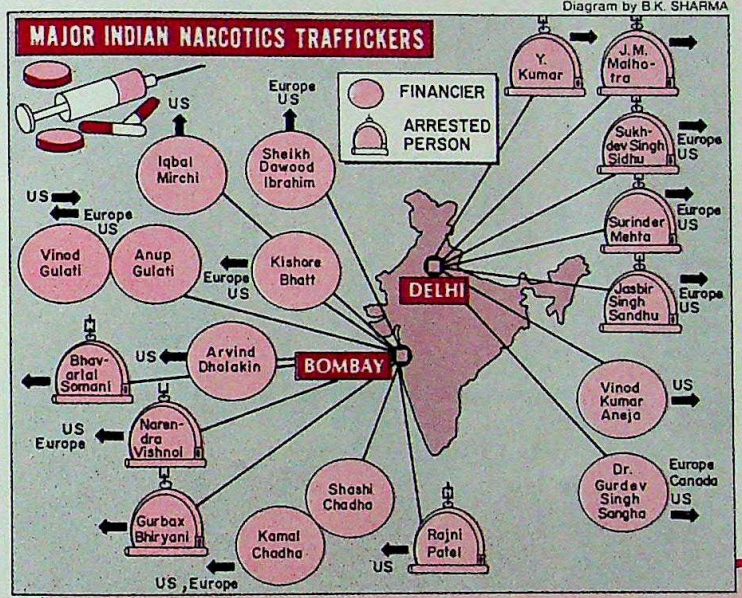
In 1982, Indian sleuths arrested Sumarbetal, a Pakistani national with 16 kg of hashish in Gujarat. As Sumarbetal was found to be a "mule" (carrier) for a major gold syndicate operating from Dubai and Pakistan, his arrest indicated that India had become a target country for international drug mobsters. He admitted under questioning that he was an agent for Haji Ashraf, then based in London.

But the DRI's first major breakthrough came in 1985, when it established that Dubai and London-based gold smugglers like Dawood Ibrahim, Ashraf and the late Abdulla were the kingpins behind the drug-trafficking through India. On September 13, 1985, sleuths seized 14,000 tolas of gold with foreign-markings and foreign currency valued at Rs 4.77 crore from a hide-out in Bombay. The syndicate behind this racket was headed by Dawood Ibrahim and the Shetty brothers of Bombay. Officials soon discovered that the gang was smuggling drugs too.

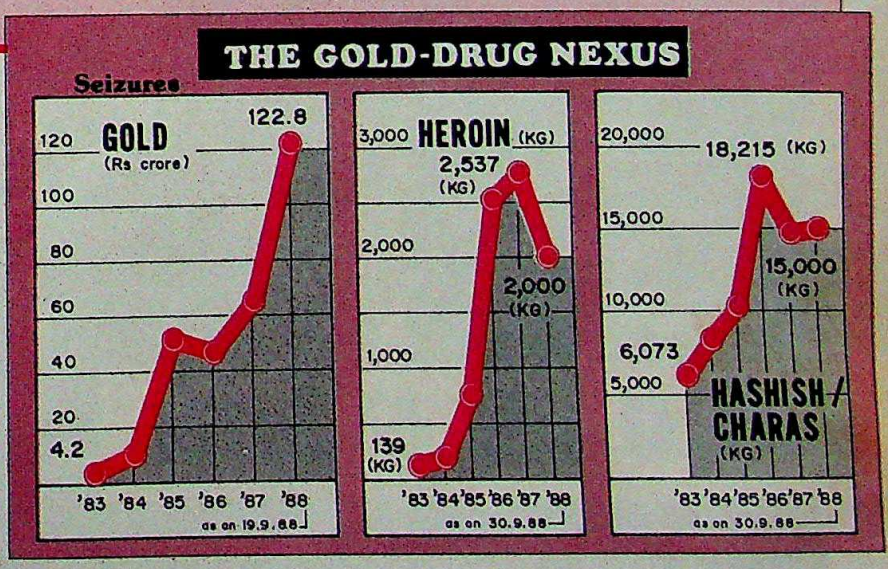
More recently in July this year, the DRI arrested 10 persons for gold smuggling. The Rs 2.78 crore seizure was among the biggest made in north India. The gold had come through the Indo-Pakistan border and there was evidence that the operation was being financed by drug peddlers settled in Amritsar. The origin of the gold was Dubai.

Last August the directorate intercepted a Maruti car on the Delhi-Haryana border and seized gold worth Rs 37 lakh. Amrik Singh and Kalyan Singh, both Pun-

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA



THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF GOLD AND NARCOTICS SEIZURES IN THE COUNTRY. THE MAJOR ROUTE FOR SMUGGLING IS AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, PUNJAB AND LONDON.



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jab-based, were arrested on the spot. Amrik Singh had earlier been arrested for gold smuggling.

The Government cites even more examples to prove that the gold-drug smuggling operations are being run by international crime syndicates:

▶ The largest quantity of hashish seized in 1988, 4,050 kg, was en route to Zurich, the world's gold capital. Though the consignment was loaded in a container headed for Rotterdam, the actual receiver was a company named Villers Import, Zurich. This operation was masterminded by a group of Gujaratis—who were also involved in a hawala racket which in turn financed their gold purchases in Zurich.

▶ In January this year, customs officials intercepted a truck in Ludhiana and recovered 175 kg of heroin and 39 kg of opium. The packages bore markings that indicated a West Asian connection.

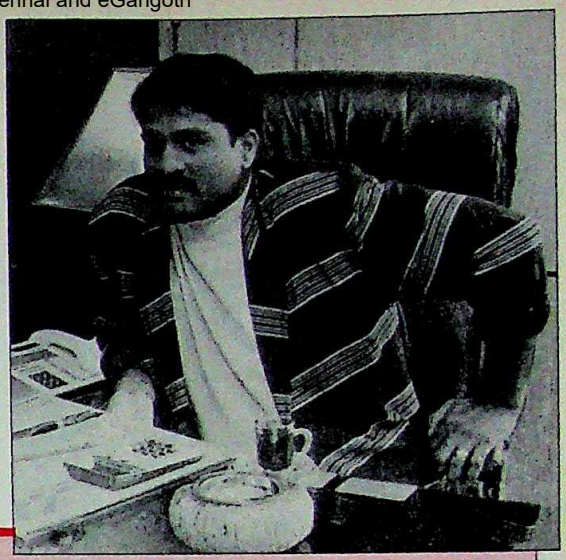
▶ A month later, DRI officials arrested Mohammed Din, a Pakistani national in Delhi and seized 279 gold biscuits valued at over Rs 1.10 crore. Din, who had recently entered India, was believed to be an important member of a West Asian gang. The gold seized from him had been supplied by a Kuwait-based criminal who also smuggled drugs.

▶ In February, Delhi Police nabbed Neeraj Samadhi, an Afghan refugee and recovered 237 kg of hashish which he had intended to smuggle to the West. The consignment had been brought to Delhi by drug couriers operating on the Punjab Border, who were also being used to smuggle gold.

▶ In May, BSF jawans had a shoot-out with a gang of smugglers in the Khemkaran sector of the Indo-Pakistan border. The smugglers escaped but left behind 150 kg of heroin of West Asian origins.

While drug money may have become the biggest means of finance for smugglers, they tap other sources for money too. According to the DRI, non-resident Indians are one such source. A few months ago, detectives found photostat copies of bank drafts while frisking passengers emplaning for Dubai and Singapore. The arrested persons confessed that the documents were proof of payment to relatives of NRIs in India. Government sources say that over Rs 50 lakh worth of Indian currency is used for hawala payments to finance gold smuggling.

Dawood Ibrahim in his Dubai office



The authorities have also come across cases of overinvoicing of imports, intended to create surpluses which could then be used to purchase gold. During the last five months, customs officials have detected overinvoicing worth over Rs 10 crore in the imports of items like books which can be imported under the open general licence. At present, book importers require neither a licence nor prior permission to bring art or educational books into the country. Taking advantage of this, smugglers "buy" books at throw-away discounts offered by foreign publishers. They apply for foreign currency from the Reserve Bank without revealing the discounts—which are often 60 to 70 per cent below the listed price—and pocket the difference in foreign exchange. This sum is stashed abroad for various hawala transactions which in turn provide finances for gold smuggling.

THE ILLICIT DRUG AND GOLD TRAFFICKING—OF WHICH INDIA HAS BECOME THE FOCAL POINT—IS DOMINATED BY SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND VIOLENT CRIME SYNDICATES IN THE WORLD.

A smuggler flanked by sleuths

Says P.K. Kapoor, director-general of the DRI: "Since foreign trade has grown tremendously, there seems to be a corresponding increase in the amount of foreign exchange remitted out of the country for financing illegal activities."

Aside from leading to a massive illegal outflow of foreign exchange, gold smuggling also adds to the unaccounted wealth in the country. It is because of this very reason that gold traders and Finance Ministry officials have been lobbying in favour of liberalising gold imports. The Government has liberalised rules somewhat, allowing traders and jewellers to import gold to make ornaments. But these half-hearted measures are unlikely to be effective unless the premium on gold declines to such an extent that it becomes uneconomical to smuggle it. Till that happens, gold will continue to have that certain glitter that makes it irresistible to both women and criminals.

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INDIAN AIRLINES

Endless Delays, Sloppy Service

Air travel was once considered a quick, efficient, and luxurious way to go reach your destination. But Indian Airlines' flights have become a definite health hazard, as shoddy service, interminable delays, and "chalta hai" attitude send passengers' blood pressure shooting up. A report:

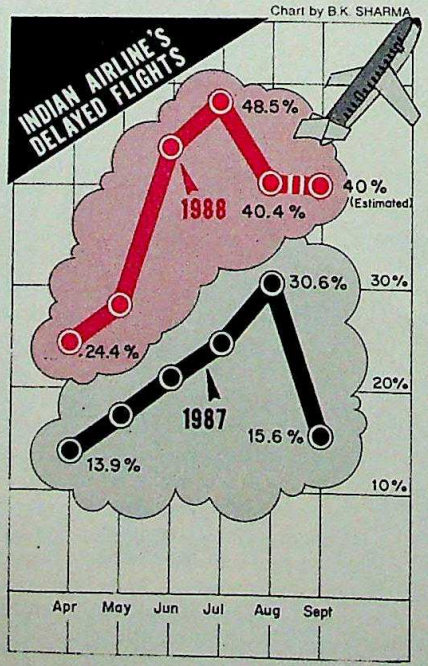
GETTING a seat on an Indian Airlines flight these days is a major achievement requiring high-level contacts in the airline's management or in the Ministry of Civil Aviation. But that is nowhere near the end of the ordeal that passengers on India's domestic carrier have been subjected to in recent weeks.

For the past few months, nearly half of the airline's flights have been getting delayed or cancelled, with harrowing consequences. Look at what happened to Amrita Kumar who was stranded in the high-altitude wintry conditions in Leh after the airline cancelled its August 8 flight from Leh to Delhi. The airline's office in Leh did not have enough money to refund the tickets or arrange a bus to take them to Srinagar. Even hotel accommodation was not arranged. "Who asked you to come to Leh? Couldn't you think of a better place," a lady at the airport counter shouted at the passengers. Finally, Kumar and 10 other passengers suffered through a tortuous 40-hour road journey to Srinagar huddled in the back of an open truck, only to be told by the airline at Srinagar that all flights to Delhi were full till September 2. Back in Delhi, Kumar dashed off angry letters to newspapers. "Does anyone in the airline possess a strong enough conscience to take the blame for this?" she asks.

The passenger can never be sure of what the airline will do. A group of passengers in Bombay who had boarded an Airbus for Bangalore were offloaded as, the staff announced, there was some problem with the aircraft. But the same plane was quickly filled up with Delhi passengers, including some VIPs and took off for the capital. Is this because of what Kumar calls the "*chalta hai*" attitude of the monopoly airline?

Casualness and indifference are recognised hallmarks of Indian Airlines, air travellers assert. Even Chairman Rahul Bajaj says: "Without competition we cannot improve. The airline has almost no power to reward and punish. We treat horses and asses alike." In most instances, passengers suffer, often because of lack of advance planning, like when an Indian Airlines Airbus with over 200 passengers on board was diverted from Delhi to Lucknow. Lucknow is a designated alternate airfield for Delhi, but when the Airbus landed there, the passengers had to remain cooped up in the aircraft because there was no ladder for them to disembark.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



This incident figured prominently in a recent meeting of the Committee on Public Undertakings. The airline's representative blamed the National Airports Authority which manages Lucknow airport, but the latter maintained that the airline had to provide its own ground equipment. Now the primitive, small airport of Ranchi is being designated a diversionary airfield for Calcutta. There is no Airbus ladder at Ranchi and the airport lacks basic amenities. One can imagine the chaos if a full Airbus is diverted to Ranchi.

But what scares passengers is the cavalier way some pilots treat their planes and their jobs, exhibiting a callous disregard for their own and passengers' lives: landing without wheels, hitting buffaloes on runways and flying into flocks of birds.

On February 8, 1985, an Indian Airlines Boeing 737 crash-landed at Calcutta airport because the two pilots, Captains Nangia and Chandok had "forgotten" to lower the undercarriage before landing. The plane was destroyed and over 100 passengers narrowly escaped death. On June 18, 1988, that near tragedy was replicated at Delhi airport: here too, the two pilots forgot to lower the landing gear and the plane slithered and slewed down the runway on its belly, sparks flying. Luck and quick action by the fire-fighting staff at the airport prevented casualties.

Mandatory safety related procedures

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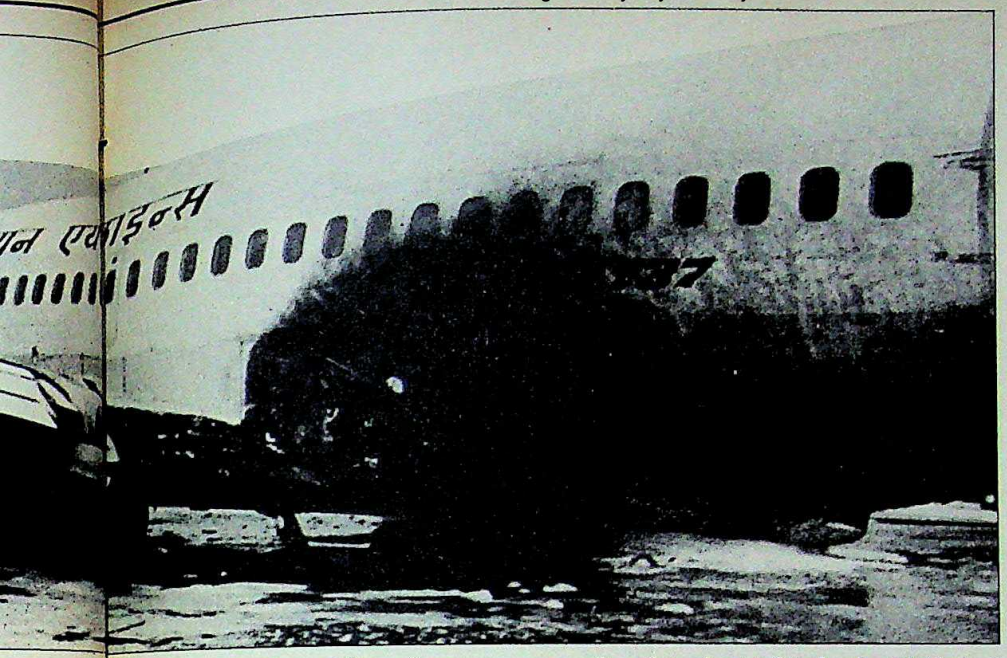


A damaged aircraft on the runway: scary trip

are often reduced to a paper exercise. Doctors who conduct pre-flight alcohol tests on pilots, sign stacks of the test reports; the pilot just fills in his name, date and flight number. Details like blood pressure and pulse rate are not even filled in, so casually are the tests treated. "Indian Airlines' pilots rarely attend weather and ATC briefings," complains a Directorate General of Civil Aviation(DGCA) official, and fly into all kinds of trouble. Like the pilot who tried to land a 737 in bad weather at Tiruchirapalli, buckled a wing in the process and then flew back all the way to Madras with a severely damaged wing rather than divert to nearby Madurai. The DGCA recommended that his licence be cancelled.

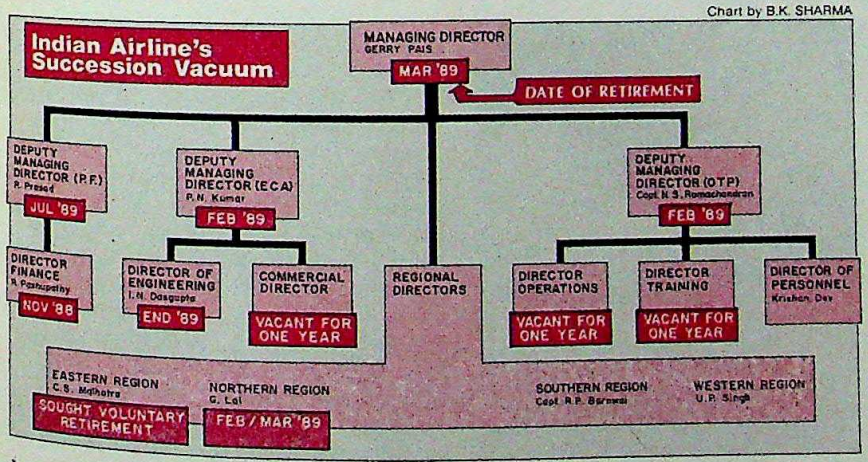
Bird hits have become almost a daily feature. Bird hits may not endanger the plane, but they literally leave a bad taste for the passengers. The vultures, hawks and kites which hover over Indian cities, can weigh up to 25 kilos. When one of these is sucked into a jet engine, it virtually destroys the engine and fills the aircraft cabin with an overpowering smell of burnt meat and feathers. This can kill the passengers' appetite. Just as well, because you should not expect too much from your inflight meal. If it's a breakfast flight, your repast will probably be idlis or vadas, reheated and hard. "I am sick of eating idlis on every early morning flight," fumed a tycoon who travels frequently between Delhi and Bombay. And you can forget about a proper non-vegetarian meal. All meals on the airline's flights are basically vegetarian these days: a small foil-wrapped piece of chicken or kabab is the airline's grudging concession to non-vegetarians. No wonder the majority of complaints received by the airline's customer services division relates to the quality of inflight meals.

Does the recent crisis indicate a deeper malaise in Indian Airlines? Perhaps yes. The inquiry into the Calcutta crash revealed that pilots Nangia and Chandok were "not on talking terms". So the pilot did not call out the standard check-list and the co-pilot sulked in silence. At Indian Airlines headquarters too, sulking is the name of the game these days. "The managing director and his three deputy managing directors are hardly on talking terms," said a member of the airline's board of directors. The need for a cohesive team was discussed recently between the Secretary of the Civil Aviation Ministry, S.K. Misra, and Indian Airlines Chairman Rahul Bajaj and changes are afoot

The breakdown in inter-personal relations and lack of communication at different levels in Indian Airlines, have far-reaching consequences. Inter-departmental coordination has deteriorated, management-union relations become severely strained, and staff morale and motivation touched rock-bottom, contributing to a spate of delays between June and September this year. This shook customer confidence and the dissatisfaction curve soared to its highest point. Equally low is the morale of the staff and highly-paid pilots. Nearly 200 Indian Airlines pilots rushed to apply for jobs with a Middle East airline which advertised for pilots recently. Fearing an exodus, the Government had to step in and warn the foreign airline off.

More than anything else, the prevailing feeling is one of hopelessness, that things are not getting done. And a lack of effective leadership. The management has not even started negotiating with its unions to finalise new wage agreements. The older agreements expired in 1985. Similarly the 1986-87 bonus has not yet

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



What paralyses decision making is the lack of succession planning. The effect will be felt when the managing director and two deputy managing directors retire.

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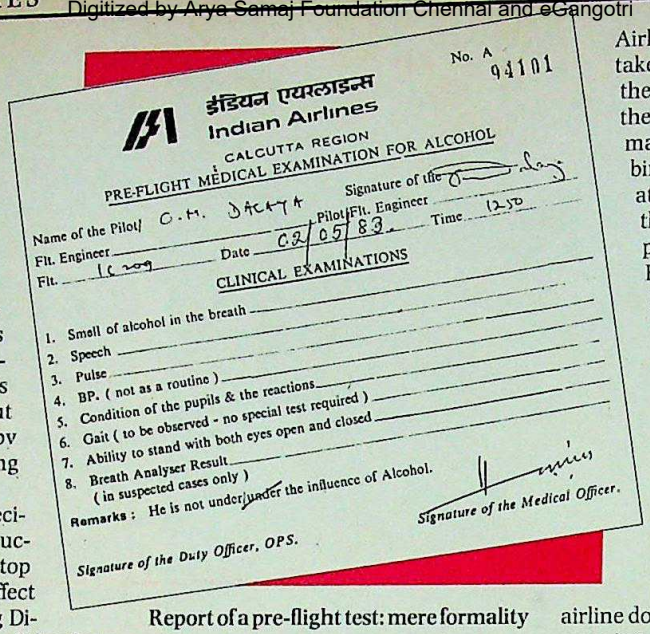
been finalised and the 1987-88 one is falling due."Delays are only half the problem. The other half is what happens after a delay takes place. There the question arises of (staff) motivation," admits Bajaj. Helpless to change things, Bajaj has even considered quitting. "My continuing as chairman would be meaningful only if the airline's performance improves. But then I have to ask myself: by leaving now will I be helping the airline?"

But what paralyses decision making is the lack of succession planning for the top management posts. The effect will be felt when Managing Director Gerry Pais, and two of the three Deputy Managing Directors P.N. Kumar and Captain N.S. Ramachandran retire by March 1989. That would leave the remaining Deputy Managing Director R. Prasad in office for only four months before he too retires. These top jobs are normally filled by promotion from among the 10 director-level department heads. Three director positions—commercial director, director operations and director training—have been lying vacant for a year.The director of finance retires by the end of this year and the regional director (northern region) by March 1989. The regional director (eastern region) has sought voluntary retirement. This means that effectively there will be only four director-level officers available out of 10 next March for promotion to the four top jobs. *(see chart).*

THE recent spate of bird hit incidents has had the airline and the airport authorities trading charges. At a meeting with the civil aviation minister last fortnight, Indian Airlines officials blamed many of their delays on an increased bird hits. That was not true, countered the Chairman of the International Airports Authority, N.K. Singh: the bird strike rate at the international airports, which handle about 60 per cent of the country's domestic flights had fallen from 6.56 per 10,000 flights in 1985 to around 3.91 in 1987 and 1988. The airline is finding alibis, says Singh.

Two-thirds of the bird hits last year were near airports run by the National Airports Authority, whose chairman,

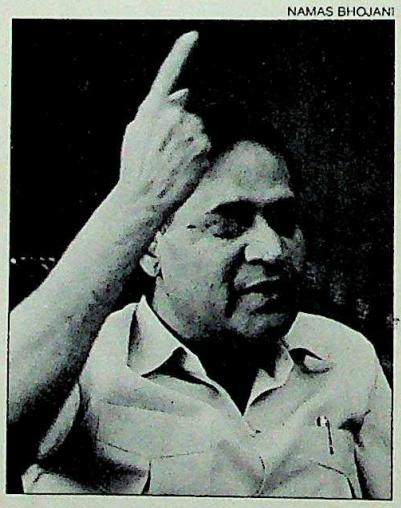


इंडियन एयरलाइन्स
Indian Airlines
CALCUTTA REGION
No. A 94101
PRE-FLIGHT MEDICAL EXAMINATION FOR ALCOHOL
Name of the Pilot C.M. DAGAR Signature of the Pilot/Flt. Engineer
Flt. Engineer
Flt. Date 02/05/88 Time 12-30
CLINICAL EXAMINATIONS
1. Smell of alcohol in the breath
2. Speech
3. Pulse
4. BP. (not as a routine)
5. Condition of the pupils & the reactions
6. Gait (to be observed - no special test required)
7. Ability to stand with both eyes open and closed
8. Breath Analyser Result
(in suspected cases only)
Remarks : He is not under the influence of Alcohol.
Signature of the Medical Officer.
Signature of the Duty Officer, OPS.

Report of a pre-flight test: mere formality

Air Marshal C.K.S. Raje, a veteran transport pilot and former director-general of civil aviation questions whether IA pilots observe bird avoidance procedures. "There's a part to be played by cockpit crew also," says Raje. "Most Indian

NAMAS BHOJANI



> **"Without competition we cannot improve. The airline has almost no power to reward or punish. We treat horses and asses alike."**
> RAHUL BAJAJ
> *chairman, Indian Airlines*

Airlines pilots prefer to do a taxiing take-off (they come taxiing onto the runway and start rolling down the runway for take-off). How many of them stop to check for birds on the runway or in the sky at the take-off end," he asks. "I think there's a trend. The same pilots keep running into birds." By comparision, says Raje, the Indian Air Force's VIP squadron which has had one bird hit in 18 months.

Pais hotly denies the charges. The main cause of delays, he says, is capacity shortage. To be fair, Indian Airlines does have a serious plane shortage, partly self created, and recently aggravated by accidents and groundings . As a result, the airline does not have standby aircraft to press into service to maintain schedules in case of delays caused by bird hits and other reasons. Without standby aircraft, one delayed flight means at least four more consequential delays because one Boeing 737 operates five to six flights a day. Partly because of its inability to maintain schedules and partly to make its performance figures look better, the airline has taken many flights off the schedule and combined other flights.

The four leased 737s arriving in the next few weeks, should give the airline some standby capacity and take some of the load off the existing 737s which are being over-utilised up to 3,000 hours a year. This has created a problem in the engineering department which geared to a maintenance effort to provide a utilisation of about 2,600 hours a year. The extra flying hours leave insufficient time for maintenance and some defects reported by the pilots in aircraft systems have perforce to be carried over. This annoys the pilots and generates tension between pilots and engineers.

There is a silver lining, Indian Airlines optimists insist. By this time next year, capacity constraint will be a thing of the past, they say, because the 19 new Airbus 320s will have started arriving. The addition of 19 planes, each of 160 seats, will make waiting lists disappear. But will the demoralised staff be able to put in the effort required to smoothly induct and operate and maintain 19 new planes? That's the crucial question, and few people are betting that IA will be able to make a smooth transition to the new aircraft.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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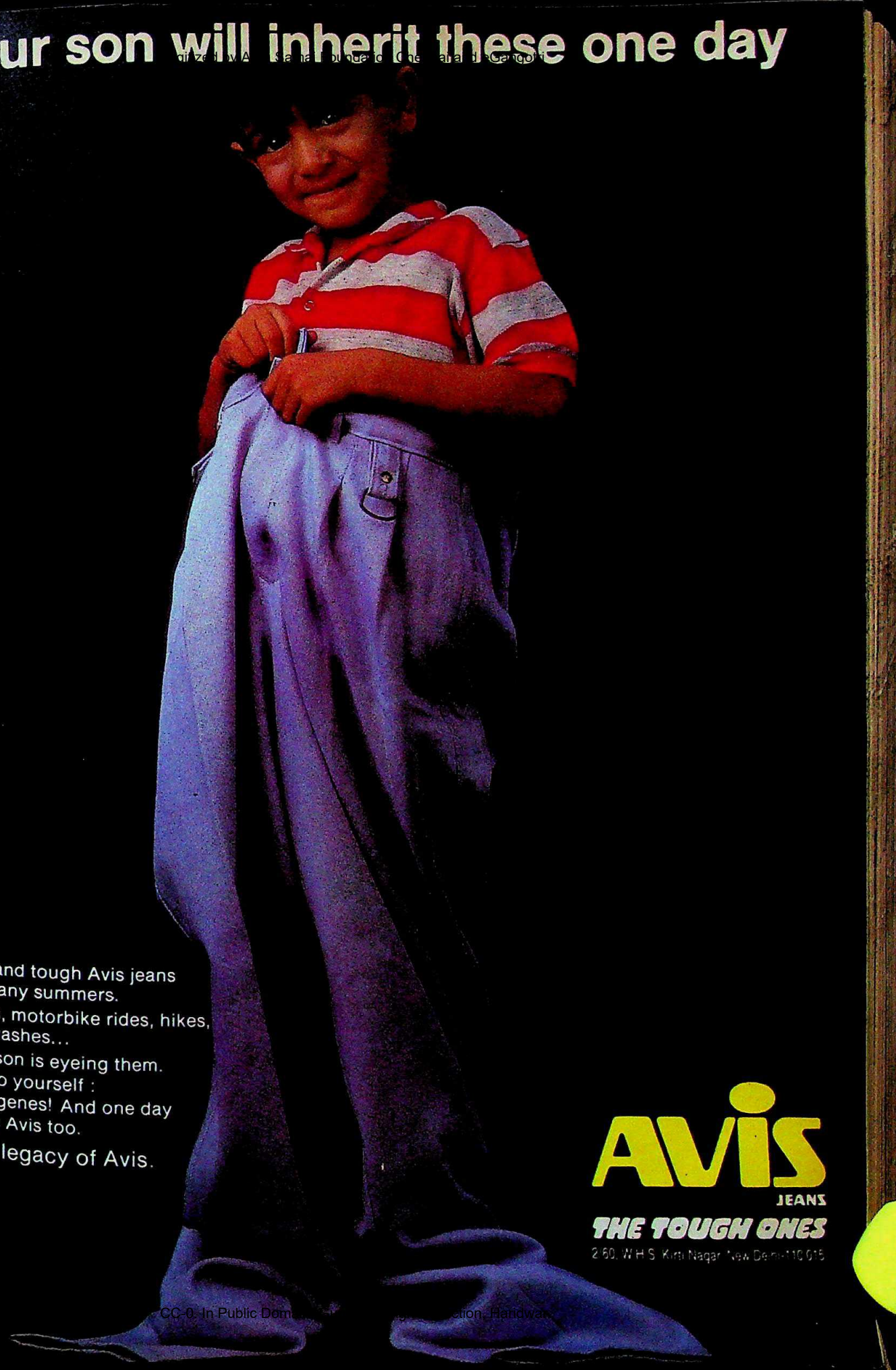
Your son will inherit these one day



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treks, sins, washes...
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So you say to yourself :
He's got my genes! And one day
he'll have my Avis too.
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JEANS
THE TOUGH ONES
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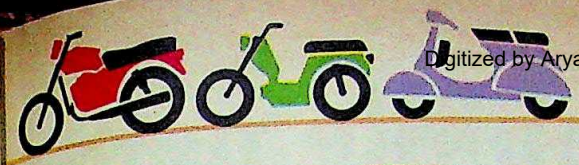
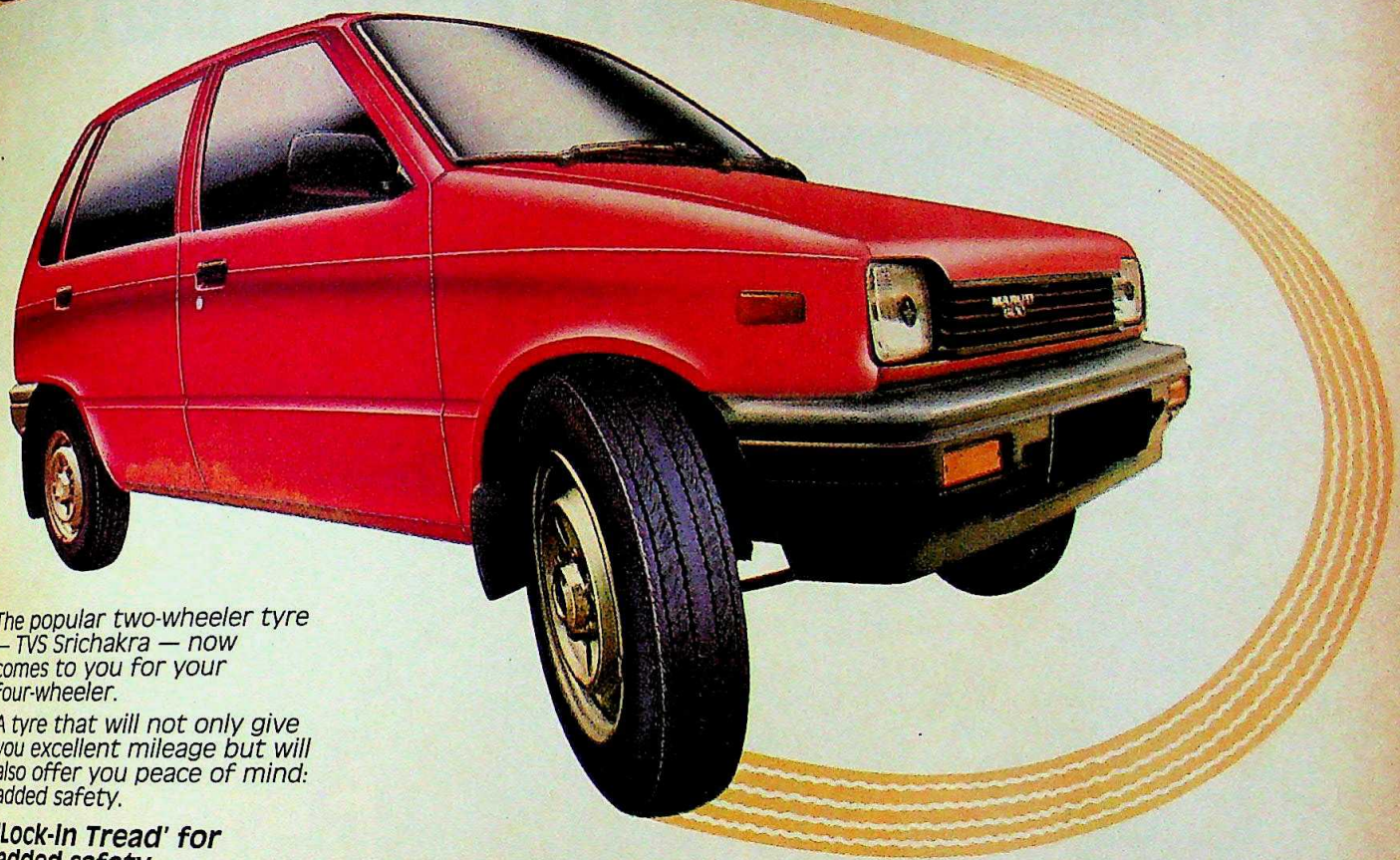
"2" that's paved the way for "4"





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TEENAGE FASHION

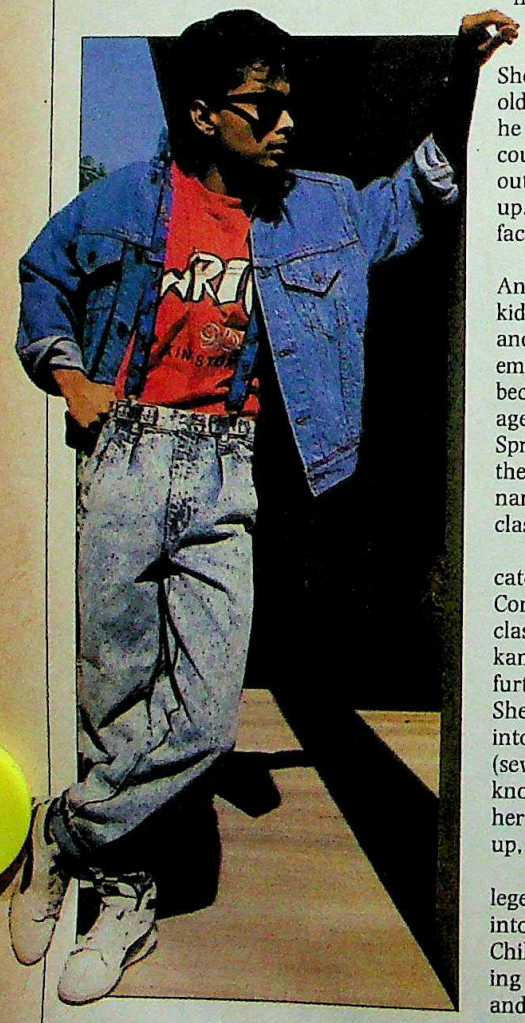
Colour in the Classrooms

School is out—or rather, in. Teenagers all across the country are now indulging in a growing obsession for looking good. Senior Correspondent SIMRAN BHARGAVA *takes a look at the new trend:*

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR

IT was hot under those curlers and it was also getting late. Nandan worried about what his teachers would say if they found out that he'd bunked school to get his hair permed. But mom, he was sure, would love it.

Mom couldn't believe her eyes. When he reached home, his hair pushed in tightly at the sides and rising in little curls on top, was she mad. She couldn't decide whether this 17-year-old looked like a boy or a girl. (He thought he looked like George Michael.) And how could he have spent Rs 250 for this outrageous new hairdo? Nandan was fed up. Mom, obviously, didn't know best. In fact mom didn't know anything at all.



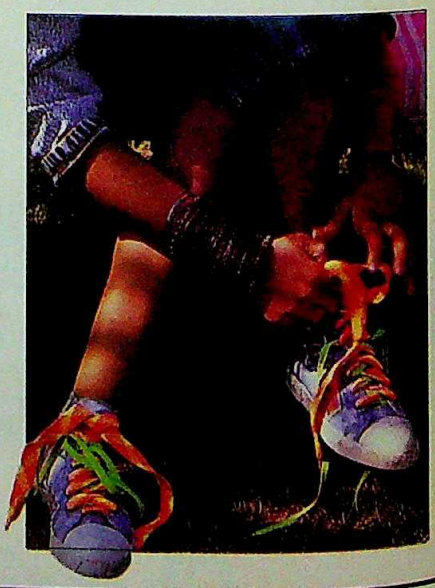
The generation gap is alive and well. And never has it looked so good. Schoolkids today have more energy, more fun and more clothes than anyone can remember. In the last few years, fashion has become a major preoccupation for teenagers, choreographed by the likes of Bruce Springsteen and Madonna. "We follow the rock stars," says Nandan (not his real name) of Modern School. Adds Shirin of class eight: "We follow our seniors."

The girls all want to be, well, sophisticated. Anushree, 14, from Mater Dei Convent, comes from a modest, middle-class home. Mom is plugging salwar-kameezes, Anushree is pushing them further and further back in her cupboard. She confesses she has conned her parents into getting her 45 skirts, 15 pairs of shoes (seven acquired last month) and "God knows how many" shirts. The result, as her mother says: "She's always dressed up, even for tuitions."

Fashion, usually considered the privilege of college kids, has somehow sneaked into schools, especially in the big cities. Children, starting from age 11, are spending more time and effort on themselves, and it shows. "Look at the girls," says Sharda Jogindar, head mistress of Modern School. "Twenty years ago they all looked awful. Ten years ago, about half looked O.K. Now, each one looks good."

There is no Indianness here, the look—a carefully cultivated street-smart image—is completely western, influenced more by music videos than anything else. "You can transplant these kids to New York and they'd fit right in," says Tarun Pasricha, 30, a former student of St Stephen's College. "They know the dress code, the lingo, the dating patterns."

Rock videos are now available by the



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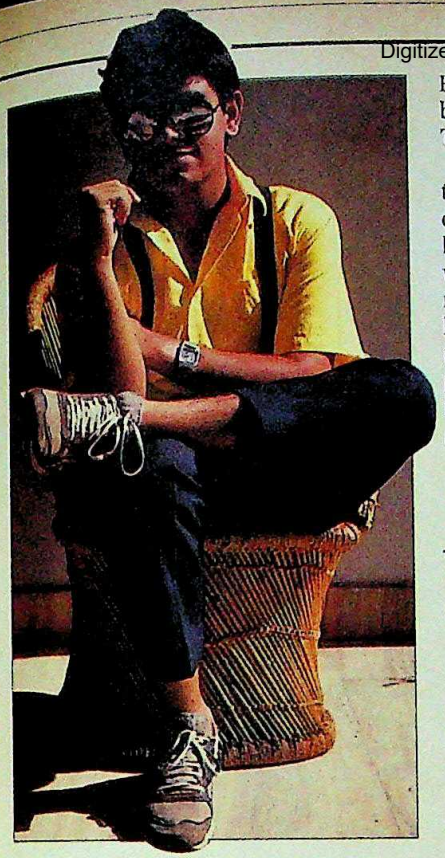


month: Bombay is already selling September '88. It may not be what the parents like but, as Layla Nazir of Cumballa Hill School in Bombay says: "That doesn't affect me. I just don't like all this Indian stuff."

The recent Human Rights Now! Concert—that brought several rock heroes together in the capital—had the kids, all dressed to the nines, dancing till 3 a.m. "I went into the depression of my life there," says Suneet Varma, 25, a fashion designer who teaches at the National Institute of Fashion Technology. "They were the best-looking bunch of kids I ever saw. There's so much life in them, I feel old."

Never was the generation gap longer than on the question of skirt lengths: the dresses are getting shorter and papa's face longer. Diya Dewan, 16, isn't allowed to wear the clingy minis that are in fashion now. So she leaves home in a salwar-kameez, quickly switches into a skirt in the car and by the time she reaches her party, the mauve mascara is just about filled in. On the way back she repeats the same exercise in reverse.

AND whatever happened to boys? Fashion wasn't supposed to have anything to do with them, but as a parent from Indore says: "I actually find today's boys a lot trendier than girls." The trousers are like Michael Jackson's—a couple of inches above the ankle, coloured socks showing—and the shirts are willowy and romantic. The more metrage that goes into them, the better. It's O.K. to wear coloured vests under shirts like Sylvester Stallone does or crumpled cotton jackets like Don Johnson in *Miami Vice*.

Pleated trousers—with printed suspenders—are also in, but with so many pleats thrown in that one tailor complained he got a crick in his neck putting the dozen pleats his young client wanted. Next time, he's going to charge double.

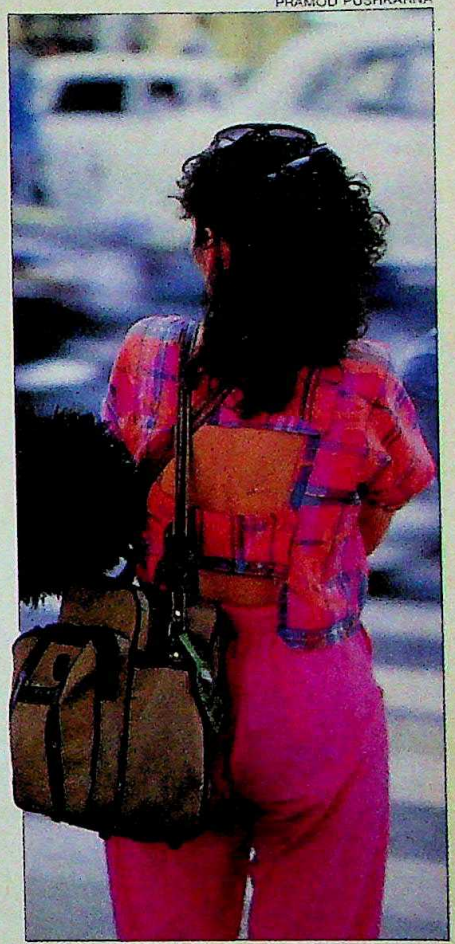
T-shirts have survived this year again, although the ones with cute messages, "If you like me, smile", have disappeared for more confident ones like: "Almost famous", "Plain crazy" and "I'm mechanically inclined, I screw anything". Like shirts, T-shirts are also loose and they come in bright, fluorescent colours and Humphrey Bogart style prints.

For parties, girls wear high-waisted skirts and trousers with a really short tank top so that when you raise your arm, a sliver of skin shows. Just like Madonna.

Ayesha, 16, was a Madonna wannabe. One day she went and got her hair bleached. When she came home, her father started crying. They ultimately compromised that Ayesha get her hair hennaed and become a redhead instead. Divya, 16, lives in Bombay. She also came home with her hair permed and then had to spend the whole day running away from her grandmother who wanted to oil it before sending her to school. And Roxanne, who is only 12, wants to wear her hair in twisted braids like Brooke Shields. "I can't go to school looking plain," she moans. "These kids are very, very influenced by rock stars," says Varma. "I mean, if there are a couple of George Michaels hanging around, then you want to look like Brooke Shields."

The good word is mousse, a wonder gel that can make your hair stand up like Elvis Presley's or fall flat like Clark Gable's.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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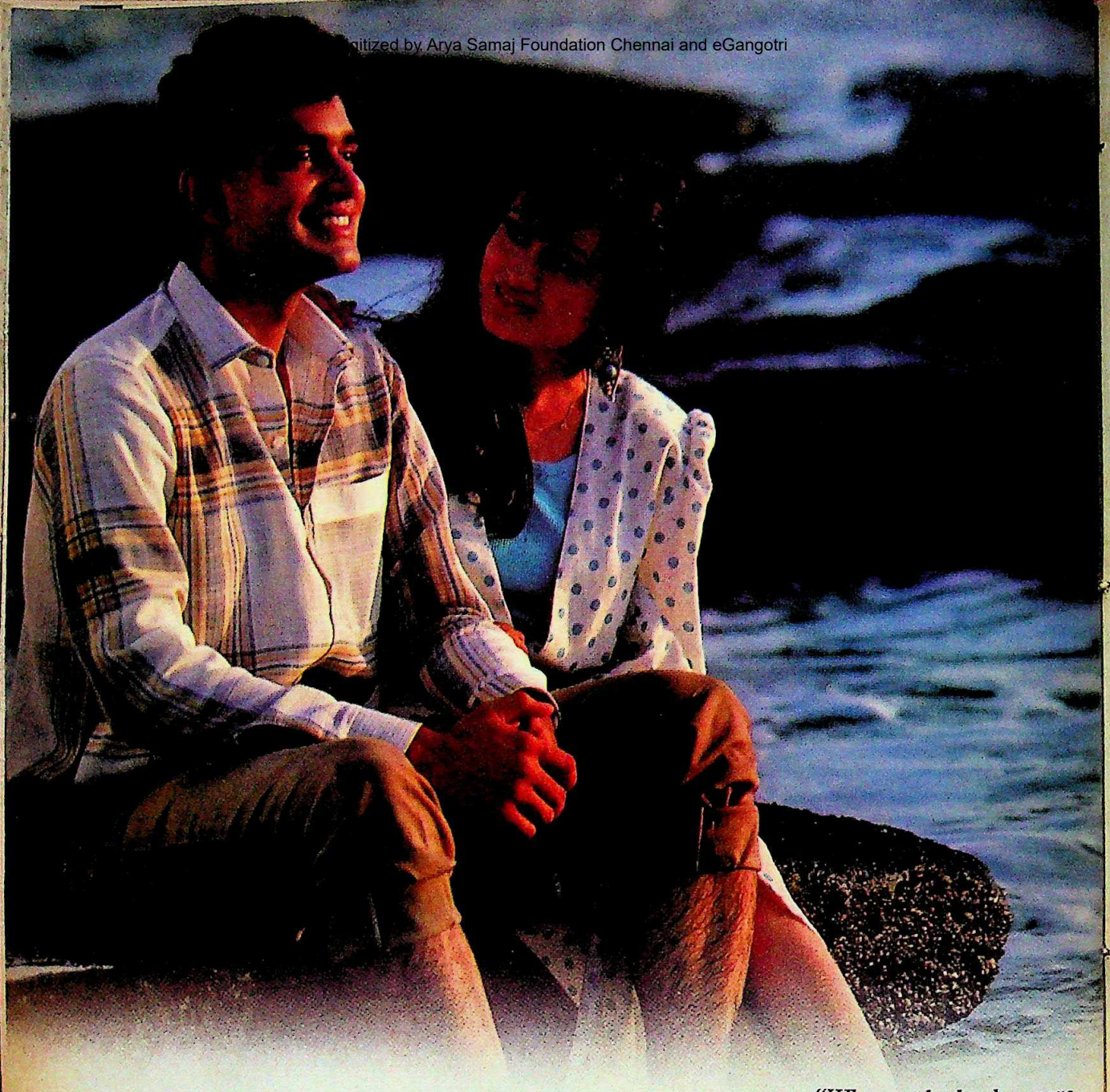

"What made the day more special was the way she looked at me and said, 'You always look so terrific'."

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A curl on the forehead can change shape every morning. Some boys will wear little pony-tails at the nape of the neck and if you look hard enough, you will guess the pop star at the end of the pony-tail. Yes, it's Sting. But there's a new look coming in. "Untidy hair," explains Anushree. "Comb it neatly and then just ruffle it up."

A really striking change is the invasion of make-up in schoolbags. Several class eight girls wear foundation and lipstick. "I know they are wearing blue eye-liner and pink shadow, but I can see them avoiding me all day," says Jogindar. "If I catch them, they pretend it's left over from the night before."

Make-up can get really loud at parties: blue hair-spray, green nail-polish and several shades of mascara on the same eye. In the eye itself, the contact lens changes colour from party to party. "All this can look pretty disgusting," says Shiamak Davar, a dance instructor in Bombay. "But they don't care."

Grown-ups may not understand this, but kids explain that the entire package has to work. They must dress up to look casual and so there is very careful attention to detail. The ear-rings are long and dangling, like Christmas decorations. You wear nothing on the neck but you are allowed seven ear-rings in one little ear. It is wiser to trade your Seiko for a Swatch; Reebok shoes are better than Nikes; and if you really want to be ultimate, then invest in Ray Ban dark glasses and get your jeans designer torn.

Shoes have just got to match the outfit although outrageous colours are welcome. And never, never wear the same outfit in front of the same group again. Once worn at a party, the outfit then gets downgraded for clubs and movies. Lacoste and Polo T-shirts are *passe* and O.K. only for funerals. Much is possible with school uniforms too, if you bribe the tailor and avoid the teacher. Plaits are a no-no. If you must, make a French braid.

Anyone who has anyone going abroad, has just got to get some absolutely necessary stuff. Here is a letter that one kid sent to his mother holidaying in the US: *Dear Mummy, Hope you're having a nice time. Don't forget to bring my studded belt, printed shoe laces, Reebok shoes, coloured vests. And Guriya wants neon laces, short socks, lace tights, a curling rod and the latest* Seventeen. *How's Dad? Love Anuj.*

IT is easy to be indulgent to the age. "I don't see why kids shouldn't be fashionable," says Jogindar. "As long as it isn't loud and doesn't affect their studies." There's a sea-change in the way teachers look at teenagers, especially as most are managing a brilliance in studies as well. Modern School students remember a time when a girl was slapped before the entire school for having plucked eyebrows. "This lot is not going to be ignored," says Varma. "They are not ashamed to be go-getters, they are totally confident."

It's true, kids have changed—since anybody's time. There's a generation gap every three years now. Kids today know their minds, they travel abroad—minus parents, and they are dating younger and younger. They argue, bribe or con parents into getting them what they want. "When we used to go on school trips, the bus was divided into two with the boys and girls throwing paper pellets at each other," says a former Cathedral School student. "This is co-education at its peak."

It really starts in class nine: the year the dance parties begin and the combs and mirrors begin appearing in school bags. The desire to belong, to be looked-at is crucial at this time. But the emphasis has changed from the face to the clothes. "When I look at a girl I first notice her clothes and then her face," admits Nandan and his friend Amar, 16, says: "That's life. The girl you like, the game you play, the music you have to tape."

School is such a special place: here everybody knows you, the juniors are always looking up to the seniors and in the 12th you become a hero. "Life is so beautifully enclosed in a school," says a teacher. "Your whole life depends on whether that girl's going to notice you."

An entire infrastructure has grown to cater to the demand. School fashions are big business. Vijay Mehta of Intershoppe regularly sends his designing team abroad to absorb ideas. And boutiques like Mischief and Roots have trendy gear available, locally. On the underground circuit, all sorts of western fashion goodies are available: smuggled-in Swatch watches (Rs 600), Nikes (Rs 700) and an array of jeans (starting Rs 500).

Teenagers trying out clothes: on a shopping spree

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

But it is perhaps the garment export surplus that has done the maximum to make high fashion possible on a low budget, thanks to the pavement bazaars on Janpath, New Delhi and Fashion Street, Bombay. Cotton trousers: Rs 75. A shirt: Rs 25. A skirt: Rs 30. "India is actually as much, if not a season ahead of European fashion," says Ravi Singh, a garment exporter. "And at one-fiftieth the price."

So, what are school-kids going to be wearing next season? Designers say the colours are going to be all the Indian brights—green, orange, deep pink, yellow. The fabrics are linen, drill and cotton knits. The skirt is going higher. Stone, snow and acid washed jeans are fading away while plain denim is trying to make a come-back. Black jeans and neon T-shirts are also predicted. The look continues to be young and preppie, there is still nothing Indian. For now, clearly, west is best.

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BENEFITS

■ Sardar Sarovar and the Narmada Sagar would irrigate 20 lakh hectares of land and generate 2,500 MW of power.

"This river is the lifeline of Gujarat. We won't tolerate any nonsense from the environmentalists."
CHIMANBHAI PATEL
Janata Party leader

The first of the large dams nearing completion

NARMADA VALLEY PROJECT

A Flood of

The controversy over the Narmada Valley Development Project, the largest and most expensive such project in India's history, acquired a sharper edge with its final clearance by the Centre now imminent. But with politicians and ecologists locked in verbal combat, the project's fate still hangs in the balance. A report.

ITS supporters call it an engineering marvel that will transform central India and herald the second Green Revolution. Its detractors call it the world's greatest planned ecological disaster. What has pitted ecologists and planners against each other is India's biggest and most controversial river basin project: the Narmada Valley Development Project.

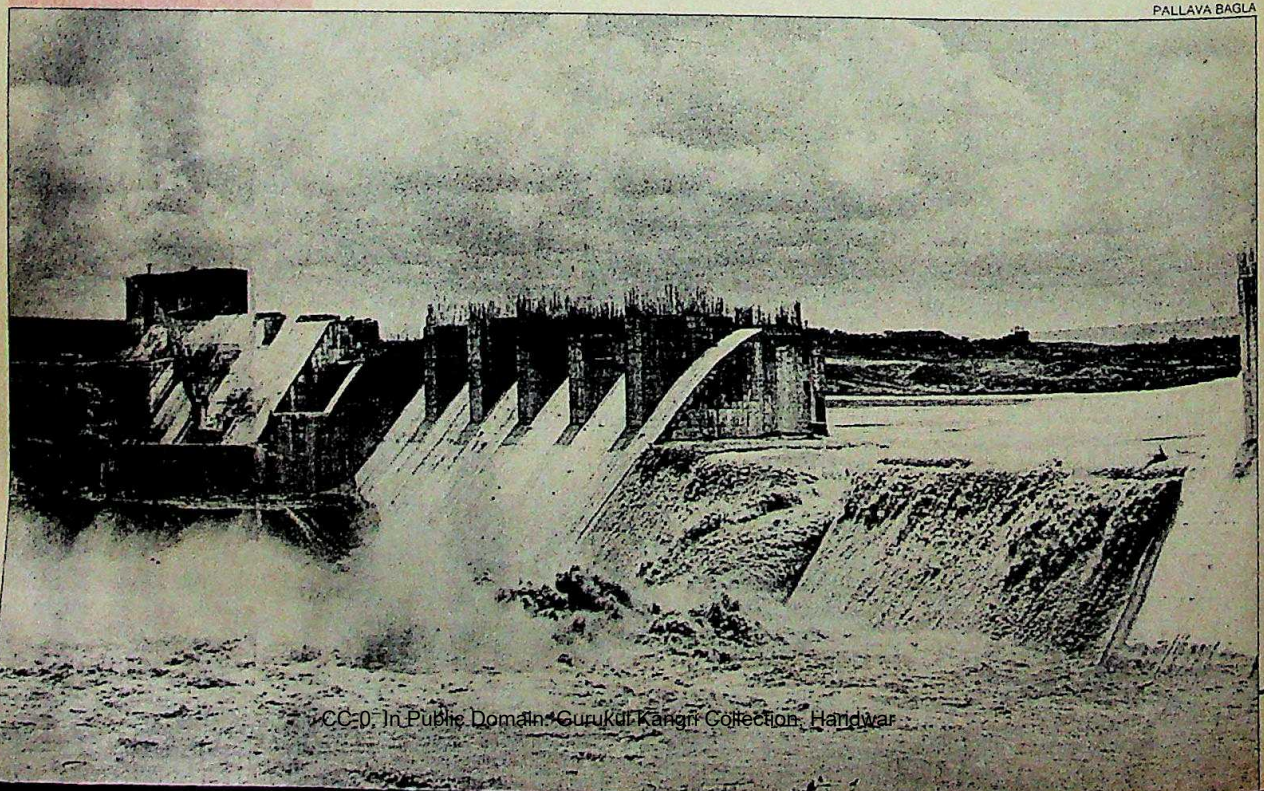
Billed at a colossal Rs 40,000 crore, the project involves constructing 30 large, 135 medium and over 3,000 small dams on the 1,312-km-long Narmada river and its tributaries. Originating at Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh, the river travels through lush forests and hills before emptying itself into the Arabian Sea (*see map*) off the Gujarat coast.

After a 40-year debate, the Centre last week cleared construction of one of the two biggest dams across the river: the Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat, and is likely to clear the other: Narmada Sagar, in Madhya Pradesh.

Together, the two dams would irrigate 20 lakh hectares in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and generate around 2,500 MW of power. But they would also create unprecedented ecological and human problems. The Narmada Sagar reservoir would result in the largest man-made lake in the world—submerging 40,000 hectares of mainly prime teak forests and another 44,000 hectares of cultivable land. And in Gujarat, the Sardar Sarovar would submerge 40,000 hectares. The dams would displace two lakh people in 500 villages.

Last month, over 100 prominent scientists, social workers, environmentalists—including Baba Amte, M.S. Swaminathan, Satish Dhawan, and Anil Aggarwal—sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi asking him to reconsider the environmental clearance granted to the project.

PALLAVA BAGLA



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Controversies

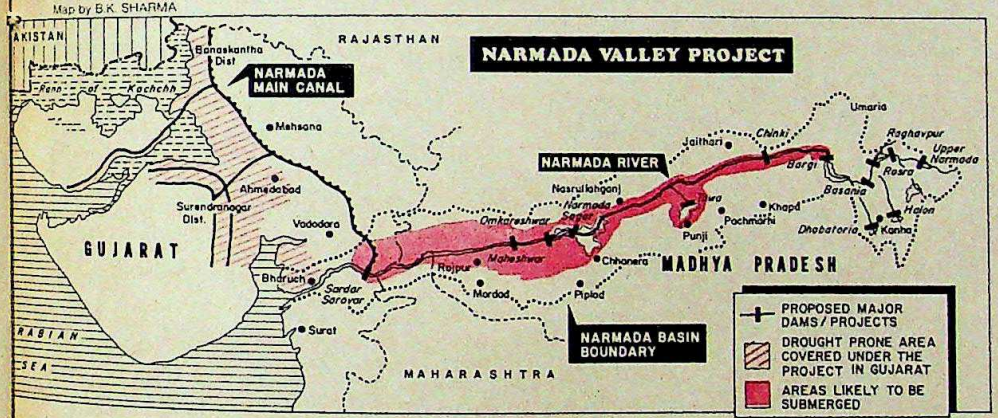
The memorandum pointed out that the project's devastating ecological impact had not been properly recorded; that the two dams far exceeded their projected costs. And worse, the land necessary for rehabilitating the over two lakh people being displaced by the project had so far not been identified.

Last month's petition triggered a full-scale controversy that's likely to blossom into a Silent Valley-type agitation. Already the politicians are panicking. Chimanbhai Patel of the Janata Party says: "This river is the lifeline of Gujarat. We will not tolerate any nonsense from the environmentalists."

There is no doubt that the project would bring enormous benefits. In drought-prone Gujarat alone, the Sardar Sarovar would help irrigate 18 lakh hectares of land, provide water to 131 towns and 4,720 villages in 12 of the state's 19 districts, and provide power. And while Narmada Sagar may not be of immediate benefit to Madhya Pradesh, the project would boost agricultural prosperity.

Argues Sanat Mehta, chairman of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam and former Gujarat finance minister: "Narmada is the only solution. It is the most widely debated and investigated and least implemented scheme in the country." Adds Dr Y.K. Alagh, member, Planning Commission: "For the Sardar Sarovar project extensive cost-benefit analysis has been done and plans to make maximum

Map by B.K. SHARMA

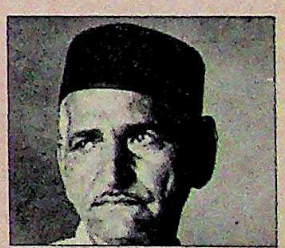


DRAWBACKS

■ Two lakh people in 500 villages will be displaced and the land for rehabilitating them hasn't been identified.

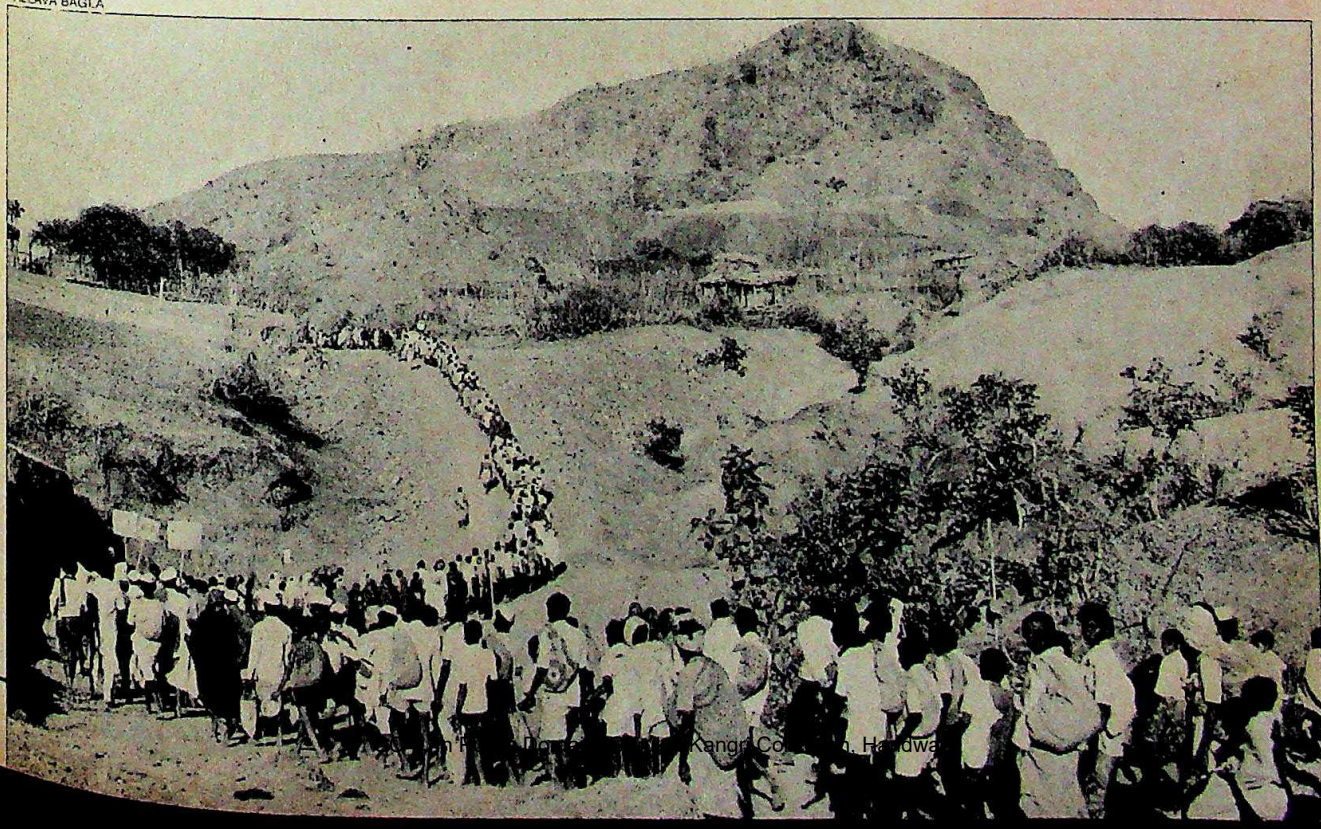
"Madhya Pradesh needs 35,000 acres, for resettlement. But almost all the vacant land is under encroachment."

LUXMI NARAYAN KHANDELWAL
president, Narmada Sagar Samiti



A march by tribals protesting against dislocation

PALLAVA BAGLA



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BENEFITS

■ In drought-prone Gujarat the Sardar Sarovar would help irrigate 18 lakh hectares of land and provide water to 131 towns and 4,720 villages.

"Narmada is the only solution. Though widely debated and investigated, it is the least implemented scheme in the country."

SANAT MEHTA
chairman, Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam

use of the river water have been evolved."

While ecologists admit the project could be advantageous, what they question is not just the possible environmental devastation but the way in which the states have justified their schemes by selective use of statistics, unsubstantiated claims and political considerations overriding the objections of the Union Environment Ministry.

The ministry's review concluded bluntly: "In an objective sense, Narmada Sagar is not ready for clearance from the environmental angle. And it is neither desirable, nor recommended, that Sardar Sarovar should be given approval in isolation of technical and other grounds." It estimated the environmental loss from the two dams to be a staggering Rs 39,000 crore.

Though the Madhya Pradesh Government has been reluctant to go ahead with the project—as Gujarat will corner most of the benefits—it is Gujarat which is keen on ramming it through. Its main rationale for supporting the dam: 60 per cent of the state's districts are scarcity-affected and the project would make Gujarat "drought-proof".

But the facts are different. Among the 12 districts are comparatively well-irrigated regions like Kheda, Vadodara, Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar. Government sources admit that only two-fifths of the state's drought-prone areas would be covered by the project.

Even the claim that the water problem in the Saurashtra and Kachchh areas would end is questionable, as the water of the Narmada canal will only go as far as Mandvi in Kachchh. And Jamnagar and Rajkot will benefit only "in years of good rains," Mehta admits.

Gujarat has backed its argument by jugglery on the most important criteria: the cost-benefit ratio. The Planning Commission laid down that the benefit of a dam project should be at least one and a half times that of its cost. For the Sardar Sarovar Project, the Tata Economic Consultancy Services (TECS), commissioned by the state, worked out that the cost-benefit ratio was a healthy 1:1.84.

But that analysis is warped. The cost estimates are based on 1981-82 figures; since then, project costs have doubled. TECS relied mainly on the state's projected potential of irrigation—hardly a credible source. Also, the costs don't cover environmental loss, only loss of revenue from forest produce.

The analysis further claims the possibility of agricultural production figures not achieved anywhere else in the country. TECS says paddy yield in the 13 irrigated zones will approximately average 4,480 kg per hectare (kg/ha)—higher than in Ludhiana (3,567 kg/ha) and Jalandhar (3,564 kg/ha), the most productive in the country.

To justify the magical 1:1.84 ratio—now raised to 1:2—the project's planners have discovered new benefits. These include; "savings in various costs because of use of hydel instead of thermal power: Rs 13,000 crore," and an addition of Rs 14,441 crore for "increased industrial production".

WHERE both governments are shown up is in the most vital problem: resettlement of families displaced by the projects. Under rehabilitation norms, the state must relocate villages as units, if the village so desires. S.C. Verma, chairman of the Narmada Valley Development Authority, the project's apex controlling body, has already quit in disgust over Madhya Pradesh's attitude to the issue.

In Madhya Pradesh, after protest rallies and memoranda to authorities, people resorted to non-cooperation. Government survey teams visiting the submergence zones are stopped from entering villages. Tribals living around the Narmada Sagar project are unwilling to move to Gujarat—what is to them, alien territory, where they would be culturally uprooted outcastes. Madhya Pradesh promised that anyone dislocated would be given better land. But it soon backtracked. People were asked to pay the price differential between the market value of the submerged land and the compensatory land. As Mohammed Haider, a cultivator says: "We don't want to move, we don't want to purchase costly land. It is the Government which is forcing us."

Ironically, even if the state Government gets its way around the problem, it doesn't have enough land: it needs 35,000 acres but records indicate the availability of 24,000 acres. L. N. Khandelwal, president, Narmada Sagar Sangharsh Samiti, says: "Almost all such vacant land is under encroachment." Gujarat offered Madhya Pradesh 12,000 hectares of land for resettlement; only a quarter was found fit for cultivation.

Gujarat has announced a rehabilitation scheme for those dislocated by the Sardar

Tribal women walk for miles in search of water

PALLAVA BAGLA

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Sarovar Project: five acres of land to each family, irrespective of the size of the earlier holding, legal or otherwise, plus cash compensation. But the scheme is on paper. Nobody knows where so much land will come from. Nearly two lakh acres of land are needed, which is neither wasteland, nor part of a reserved forest. Though government records claim that the land is available, they are misleading. As Medha Patkar of Narmada Dharangrast Samiti charges: "Their records say land exists, but when you go and identify the land you find there is illegal occupation."

The World Bank, which is giving a loan of $450 million (Rs 630 crore) for the Sardar Sarovar dam, recommended that forest land be used for resettlement. But this would be a violation of the Forest Conservation Act.

The Gujarat Government will now have to resort to the costly option of buying land from private parties to relocate the displaced. Not surprisingly, land prices have hit the roof: in Dabhoi land is now Rs 50,000 per acre (the earlier rate was Rs 2,500 per acre).

With no revenue land available, both states decided that afforestation would be undertaken on land earmarked as degraded forests. This itself would be a violation of the stipulated policy but environmentalists have other fears. They feel that as it's impossible to replicate forests, the states will only plant commercial monocultural plantations. As Ashish Kothari, of the Delhi-based Kapavriksh, the only environmental action group to have done detailed studies of the project, asserts: "The Government's past record does not inspire any enthusiasm."

Further, no census was taken of the abundant wildlife in the catchment area and the threat the project would cause to its habitat. Mehta seeks to allay all fears—environmental and rehabilitatory—by promising to pump in more money. Activists say that regions closer to the dam in the command area will benefit more than those downstream. Mehta counters that the volumetric control of water supply in the 438-km-long Narmada canal will avoid precisely this. He argues that few projects have been scrutinised so closely.

A decade ago, the Narmada Project was estimated at Rs 4,000 crore. Today the Sardar Sarovar alone will cost Rs 13,000 crore. Gujarat has been lobbying for the Narmada Valley scheme to be declared a national project—mainly for the finances this would assure. The Centre's refused.

Unfazed, Mehta asserts he will tap funds from various sources including non-resident Gujaratis, the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development, state-owned corporations and investment bankers—and plans on going public, reserving a corpus for interest payments which, he says, will come from the revenue generated by the project. But the shortfall will still be Rs 3,000 crore.

Gujarat is cutting corners: a proper plan for catchment area treatment hasn't been prepared—vital for reducing silt load and increasing the life span of a dam. Yet, the total area to be so treated has been reduced from 47,320 sq km to 7,919 sq km. As the Environment Ministry strictured: "The reduction was not based on scientific analysis but thumb rule."

Political pressure overruled the objections of T.N. Seshan, then environment secretary, and the project got a go-ahead last June. In Gujarat, support for the Sardar Sarovar dam has cut across party lines—both the ruling Congress(I) and the opposition parties are equally vociferous in their backing.

But the Sardar Sarovar will be less efficient unless Narmada Sagar is completed, as this will regulate supply of river water in Gujarat. But Madhya Pradesh has been reluctant; it has little incentive for a project which will generate power the state does not need, destroy forests and has low irrigation potential.

The ministry has now recommended reduction in the heights of the dams to reduce the land under inundation. If the height of the Narmada Sagar dam is lowered from 860 ft to 814 ft, firm power generated will decline from 118 MW to 22 MW, but land lost will be only 35,000 hectares as against 90,000 hectares; and instead of over a lakh people, 20,000 will be displaced. Similarly, decreasing the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam from 455 ft to 420 ft would entail only 20 per cent of the present estimated area being submerged and 10 per cent of the people being dislocated.

As the battle enters its last phase, the hurdles are obvious. Those being displaced are getting organised. International environmental groups are lobbying the World Bank to avoid funding the Project. And, with eminent people having joined the bandwagon, both states may find it increasingly difficult to implement the project. —SALIL TRIPATHI in Gujarat and N.K. SINGH in Madhya Pradesh

DRAWBACKS

■ Narmada Sagar would submerge 40,000 hectares of forests and 44,000 hectares of cultivable land. Sardar Sarovar would submerge 40,000 hectares.

"We don't want to move to Gujarat, away from our homes. We don't want to purchase costly land. It is the Government which is forcing us to do so."

MOHAMMED HAIDER
a cultivator

PALLAVA BAGLA

A forest threatened by the project.

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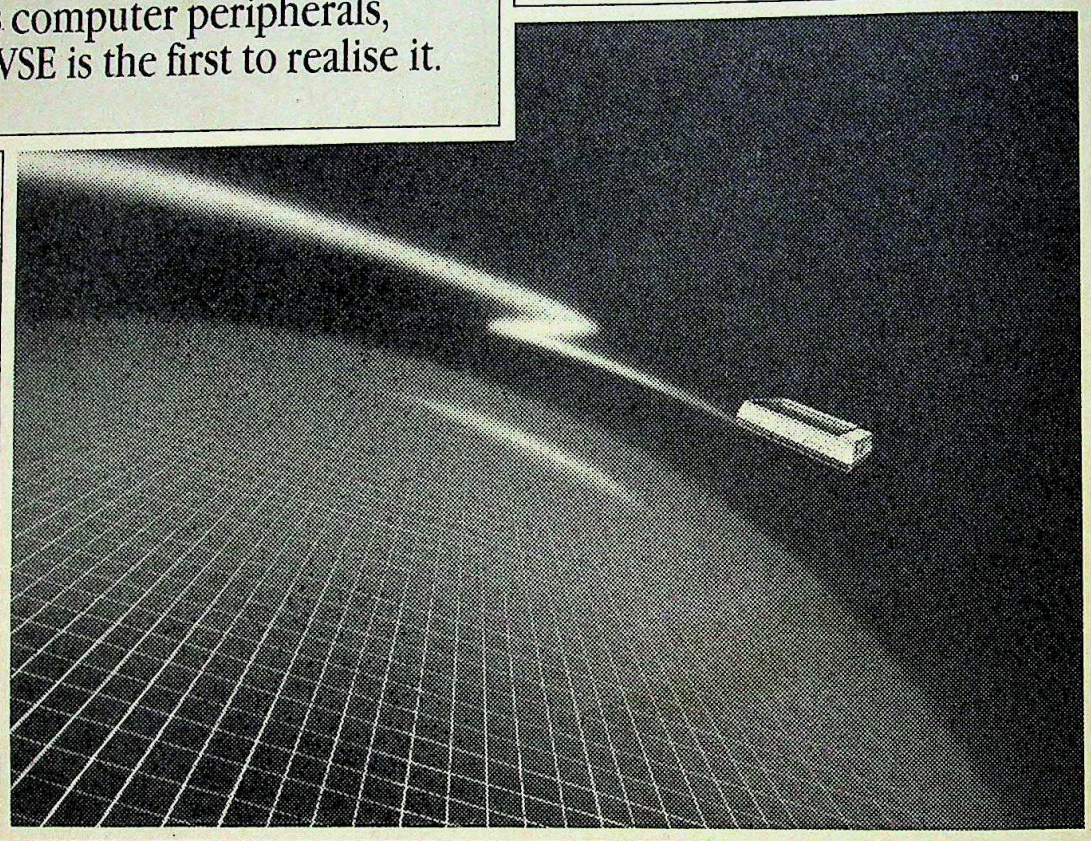
When the potential is as vast as computer peripherals, TVSE is the first to realise it.



The world of computer peripherals holds the biggest challenge today, far greater than that of computers themselves.

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Consider next the phenomenal demand for computers (today there are 50,000 computers, by the end of 1991 there will be 1,10,000 computers at a conservative estimate). Now imagine the concommitant demand for computer peripherals!

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BETWEEN THE LINES

COMPANIES that advertise their chairmen's speeches at annual shareholders' meetings had better beware: Big Brother is watching you. The taxman is poring through chairmen's speeches for statements about corporate prosperity, checking on the dividends these companies pay their shareholders and then looking at their excise and income tax payments. Although Finance Ministry officials concede that dividends can be paid out of reserves, corporations that fork out fat dividends but small sums of taxes are automatically suspect. In fact, the Finance Ministry has fed the names of 50 such companies into its computers. The move is part of a new strategy to mop up more taxes.

PACKAGE DEALS

BACKED by government efforts to step up packaged tea exports, the Indian tea industry is suddenly seeing a host of overseas marketing tie-ups. Several tea firms have signed agreements with supermarket chains abroad to market packed tea. Duncans has an agreement with Barends of the Netherlands whereby the Dutch company will test market a Duncan brand, the public sector Tea Trading Corporation of India has signed up with Marks and Spencer of the UK and Tata Tea is negotiating with the West European store chain Maradoon. And at least one other tea concern has clinched a deal with Currey Four, a European retail chain. The moving force behind all these initiatives is of course the official recognition that tea packets bring more foreign exchange to the country than tea sold loose.

SPROUTING WINGS

THE Government has cleared ITC's proposal to enter the hybrid seeds business. The tobacco company has tied up with North Dakota State University in the US for starting a project which will turn out 10,000 tonnes of seeds per year. Meanwhile, the cigarette giant's edible oils project has been delayed. The Government granted ITC permission to extract oil from the so-called minor seeds, such as sunflower and cotton (major seeds are reserved for small units), but failed to specify that it could refine the oil as well. So the company has now asked the Government to extend its permission to oil refining too.

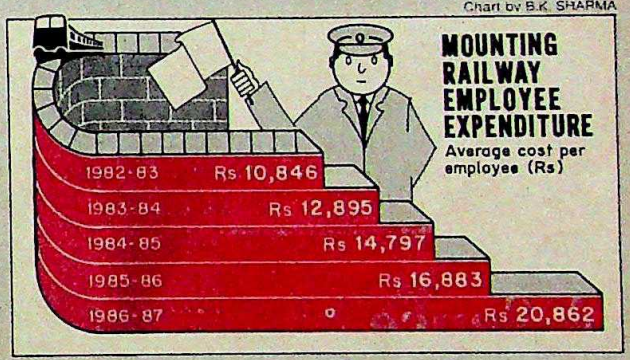
GREEN PASTURES

FERTILISER company Zuari Agro Chemicals is now moving into processed vegetable export. The K.K. Birla concern is talking to American food giants Kelloggs and Pilsbury Foods on the possibility of a joint-venture to process and export a range of vegetables such as tomatoes, mushrooms, bamboo shoots and peas to the US. Zuari Agro has in fact signed a conditional agreement with Pilsbury Foods, but a final deal with a foreign partner will be arrived at only in a few weeks, and the question of a collaborator is open right now. The project is expected to cost more than Rs 12 crore and is to be located in Himachal Pradesh. Zuari Agro will initially grow the vegetables, and later set up a growers' network. Meanwhile, the company is laying the groundwork for a Rs 180-crore cement project in Rajasthan, for which it has secured a letter of intent. Land is being acquired and the management is scouting for technical know-how.

PRIVILEGED FEW

IF the mounting expenditure of the Indian Railways on its employees over the last few years (*see chart*) is any indication, railway employees never had it so good. With over 16 lakh employees, the railways account for a tenth of the total number of jobs in the public sector. In the five-year period between 1982-83 and 1986-87, the average cost per railway employee nearly doubled (from Rs 10,846 to Rs 20,862). To

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



put that into perspective, the average employee's income in 1986-87 was more than double the average Indian family's income. Still, there's no gainsaying the fact that bank employees are even better off. The per-employee-expenditure by banks came to a whopping Rs 30,858 in 1986, the latest year for which figures are available.

FAST TRACK

THE Indian Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) is diversifying into fast foods. The state-owned hotel enterprise has already opened fast food outlets at Vaishnodevi and Mussourie, and has on its anvil outlets at Katra, Hardwar and Varanasi. Most of these will be in partnership with private hotels or state government organisations. The Varanasi shop, for instance, will be a joint venture between the Uttar Pradesh Government and ITDC, with the former holding 51 per cent of the equity. The corporation is also examining the possibility of starting outlets in a few bigger cities, by tying up with some non-resident Indians who've submitted proposals. There's also an ambitious plan to launch a fast food chain overseas, but that's a long way down the road. Such chains were once a hot favourite with big business, but the excitement died down after more than one project failed to take off (example: United Breweries' Pizza King). ITDC hopes to succeed where others failed by going downmarket, offering inexpensive Indian food and venturing into untapped towns and cities.

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EIGHTH PLAN

A Time for Austerity

Amidst a resource crunch, the planning commission seeks a tough line

THE country and the Government could do with a stiff dose of austerity. Both have been furiously spending money, and living beyond their means.

Most economists know that of course. What's new is that the country's planners have announced that long-overdue conclusion as they set about drawing up a blueprint for the Eighth Five-Year Plan. Voicing their concern bluntly, the Planning Commission is, either explicitly or implicitly, asking the Government to:

► Raise more revenue by widening the tax base and, possibly by withdrawing some allowances now given to the corporate sector.

► Cut expenditure. So chronically losing public sector units will have to be closed or merged with private companies.

► Cut subsidies. On the fertiliser subsidy front, the Government could do this perhaps by introducing a dual fertiliser pricing scheme whereby manufacturers would be allowed to sell say 25 per cent of their output in the open market to offset losses on controlled-price sales.

► Put existing infrastructural assets to more efficient use, instead of investing fat sums in new capital-intensive projects.

► Improve the domestic climate for foreign investment.

► Double the volume of exports.

► Jack up the savings rate, both by providing incentives and by curbing consumption. (One instrument for this, suggested privately: reintroduce the compulsory deposit scheme for taxpayers.)

Nor is this all. The Planning Commission is working on several schemes to decentralise planning, including model plans for five districts in the country. And if the commission has its way, the Government would vacate many areas it now operates in, throw them open to the private sector, and play a less interventionary role in the economic realm. "My view is that the Government should vacate a number of areas and reduce economic regulation to the minimum," says Raja Chelliah, member of the Planning Commission.

Others at the commission echo the point. Says Abid Hussain, the ebullient commission member: "The state will continue to intervene, but it will be a qualitatively different intervention. It will intervene more in matters of social concern than in economic matters."

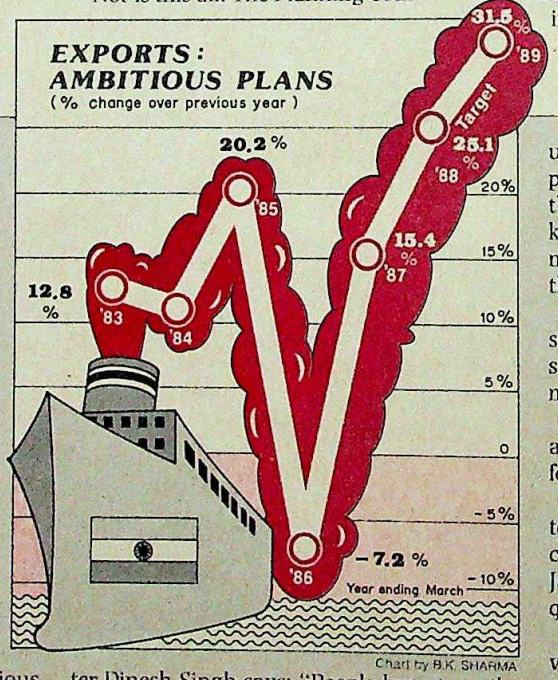

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

EXPORT

A Sense of Purpose

OVER the last few weeks, senior bureaucrats have been meeting almost every week, sometimes every third day. Last fortnight was no exception. A committee of secretaries headed by Cabinet Secretary B.G. Deshmukh went into a huddle, while Commerce Ministry officials burned the midnight oil.

Behind this rash of meetings is a subject that's suddenly dear to the Government: exports. In fact, the Government has set an ambitious new export target for this year—roughly Rs 21,000 crore, an increase of nearly 31 per cent over last year's exports of Rs 15,719 crore. The new target is also 10 per cent higher than the one which had been announced earlier for 1988-89.

To meet the new goal, the Government is launching a new five-pronged export strategy—and calling upon Indians to make sacrifices. Commerce Minister Dinesh Singh says: "People have to make sacrifices. If we're going to export high quality goods, their consumption in the country has to be curtailed." For example, says Singh, India should export high quality rice and import low quality rice to meet local demands.

Minister of State for Commerce Priya Ranjan Das Munshi explains the essence of the strategy when he says: "What we are looking for is an increase in the per unit values realised by our exports. We'll give a new push to thrust areas, look for new markets, ask big houses to export more, and achieve a breakthrough in engineering exports."

The new strategy follows a series of official export-related steps, announced in less than a month. Among them:

► New items (cement, linear alkyl benzene) have been picked for export.

► A 5-per cent subsidy rise for textile and garment exports to countries such as Australia and Japan which don't impose import quotas.

All this, it is hoped, will provide a fillip to the so-called 13 thrust areas the Government believes have export potential—garments, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, and chemicals, to name a few.

The big question, however, is: why is the Government suddenly so eager to push exports? One answer lies in the deteriorating balance of payments position. But Dinesh Singh insists that there's more to it than this. "The new strategy is not a short term plan to tide

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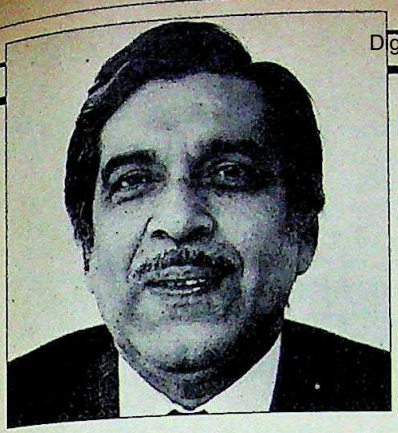
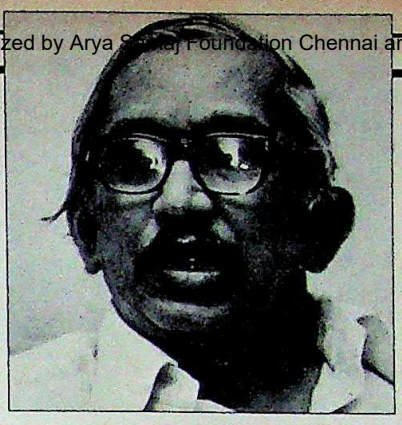


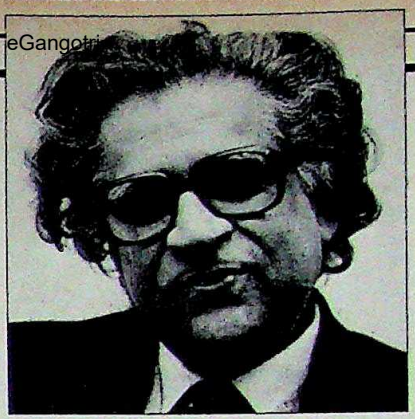
"The plan is going to design the systems for energy and material efficiency."

Y.K. ALAGH
member, Planning Commission



"The Government should reduce economic regulation to the minimum."

RAJA CHELLIAH
member, Planning Commission



"The state will continue to intervene, but more in matters of social concern."

ABID HUSSAIN
member, Planning Commission

Some of this may or may not find a place in the eighth plan when it finally takes shape months from now, because the planners are still at the loud thinking stage. But a few of the tougher recommendations were on the agenda of a meeting Planning Commission members were scheduled to hold late last fortnight with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and some of his cabinet colleagues.

Nevertheless, there's little doubt that austerity will not be welcomed by politicians cocking an eye at the next general elections. Said a cabinet minister: "With the elections coming near, there's no possibility of implementing these measures. Only after a new government is sworn in next year can they be implemented."

Few would, however, question the need for reform. Alarmingly, the Government is spending far more than it gets, and over the balance of payments problem. It's a long-term strategy to boost exports, which naturally will have short-term benefits in terms of balance of payments."

Nevertheless, with the Government strapped for cash to fund plan investments it will have to look overseas for finance. The ability to repay foreign loans partly depends on export earnings. Realising this, the Government had at one point talked of pegging the export target at 30 per cent in dollar terms, till realism prevailed.

No one questions the need for stepping up exports. It's the new target that arouses scepticism, both within the Commerce Ministry and private industry. A high Commerce Ministry functionary concedes privately: "I don't think we can reach over 30 per cent this year—until big business and the engineering sector gear up."

Big engineering companies have a dismal net foreign exchange earnings record. For instance, in 1985-86, 100 big engineering concerns accounted for a foreign exchange outflow of Rs 841 crore, their foreign earnings worth just Rs 491 crore.

Despite a spurt in exports last year, the engineering industry has not fared well. Admits an official of the Confederation of Engineering Industries, the industry's apex association: "Engineering companies traditionally exported to West Asia and Africa where quality was never a primary criterion.

"The new strategy isn't a short-term plan to tide over the balance of payments problem. It's a long-term strategy to boost exports....People have to make sacrifices."

DINESH SINGH
commerce minister

With this market crashing, the industry has taken time to gear up to meet the requirements of the high quality conscious western market. We have such a poor image there, and it takes time to change this."

There are complaints too of red tapism and the problems inherent in a shortage economy. Says Siddharth Shriram, deputy managing director of DCM Ltd: "Importers ask for a consistent supply of goods. We exported a commodity only to find the next day that there is a shortage in the internal market. Therefore, we had to supply it there." B.P. Gunaji, secretary-general of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry, makes the point that official policies are often inconsistent. "You have to decide which is more important—to earn revenue for the Government or foreign exchange. There seems to be a conflict here. The export of dies was booming. Yet the Government cut duty drawbacks, affecting exports," says he.

Nonetheless, these are irritants that can be resolved in the long run. If nothing else, the latest official strategy reflects a new seriousness of purpose which cannot be soon enough.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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living on borrowed cash. In the six years between 1981-82 and 1986-87, government revenue grew at an average rate of 17.2 per cent. But outlay soared by 18.3 per cent. At current levels of income and spending, the Government's revenue-expenditure gap should rise to a shocking Rs 50,000 crore five years from now.

Worse, most of the Government's income is used to meet administrative expenses and non-developmental expenditure. As the Planning Commission notes in a preliminary paper on the eighth plan, the government sector's wage bill has doubled in the first six years of this decade. And not just due to inflation either. If wages had just kept pace with inflation and if the total number of employees had remained constant, the total wage bill would have been lower by Rs 4,500 crore.

Compounding the problem, the Government spends nearly three-fourths of its revenue on subsidies, interest and defence. The upshot: it has to borrow to fund plan investments. (In the first three years of the seventh plan, over 96 per cent of investments was funded by loans). Together, all these have put the country deeply in hock. The Centre's liabilities burgeoned by an astonishing 179 per cent, from Rs 59,749 crore in 1980-81 to Rs 1,66,546 crore in 1986-87.

CLEARLY, the position is grim. "The eighth plan situation is very different from that of the other plans. It's starting with a very difficult resource position," says Amaresh Bagchi, director of the government-sponsored National Institute of Public Finance and Policy. As a top government official argues, the plan is unique in that it faces "a complete fiscal erosion in government, and a deteriorating balance of payments position."

That's why the planners are calling on the Government to embark on a multi-pronged strategy of pruning expenditure, raising revenue, encouraging individuals and companies to save more and discouraging wasteful spending.

They are also turning the spotlight on using assets more efficiently, and specifying how this is to be done. In fact, Planning Commission member Y.K. Alagh sees this as one of the eighth plan's highpoints. "The plan is going to design the systems for energy and material efficiency in the economy. Targets won't be in terms of output but efficiency. This is where the eighth plan will differ from the seventh plan."

JAGANNATH NEGI

"We want to enlarge the tax base. We're first looking at the service sector."

AJIT PANJA
minister of state for finance

If efficiency is one buzz-word, renewal and modernisation are the others. Citing roads as an example, a source says that one out of 10 national highways needs extensive repairs; a few power plants may have to be replaced altogether. Says he: "It's like a car which has been carrying on with repairs."

With funds scarce, fresh investments in heavy industry are virtually ruled out. Explains Chelliah: "Let us import paper instead of putting up a paper mill. That's possible provided you raise exports."

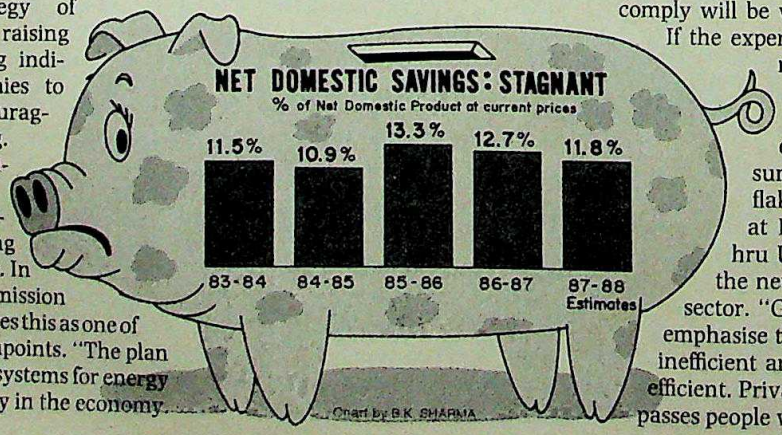
While that partly explains the big new export push (*see box*), questions remain as to how such sweeping transformation will be brought about. The Government is setting its sights high, and is seeking an ambitious—some say too ambitious—annual economic growth target. The target was to be decided at last fortnight's meeting, but the consensus seemed to be veering around to the view that a growth rate of 6 per cent, 1 per cent more than in the seventh plan, would be viable.

Whatever the rate, higher growth calls for heavy investments. One way of rustling up the cash is to step up the already high overall rate of savings—now at over 21 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Can this be done? Raising the rate by even 1 per cent really means jacking up savings by roughly Rs 3,000 crore. The Planning Commission believes that it can—if the Government balances its revenue and expenditure. In fact, the Government's profligacy has tethered the savings rate. Cut this out and the rate goes up to far more than 23 per cent.

Yet the argument has its catches. Putting the lid on government expenditure is easier said than done. Asks one economist dryly: "Can you compel government servants to accept a wage freeze?" And households savings have been stagnant too, if not less (*see chart*) in recent years. Some economists believe that, increasingly, individuals are going on a spending spree. If that is true, the resources nut may be a bit more tough to crack than planners think.

The sunny side of the revenue picture is that the Government is finally casting its tax net wider. "We want to enlarge the tax base," says Ajit Panja, minister of state for revenue. "We're first looking at the service sector. For example, hairdressers have mushroomed. None of them pays tax." Over the next few months, the Government will also be launching an experiment in an undisclosed small state. It will mail pre-paid post cards to doctors, lawyers and other professionals asking them to fill in details about their income. Those who fail to comply will be visited by the taxman. If the experiment results in more revenue, it could well go national.

Meanwhile, several of the planners' assumptions are attracting flak. G.S. Bhalla, professor at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, is critical of the new swing to the private sector. "Government statements emphasise that the public sector is inefficient and the private sector is efficient. Private sector efficiency bypasses people who don't have money.



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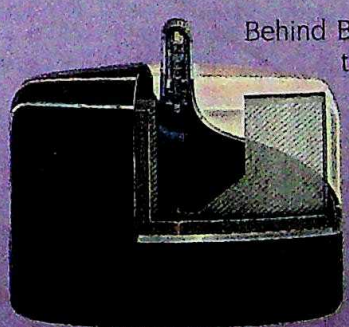

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The approach shows a lack of understanding of India. Without big public intervention, we cannot reach out to the majority of Indians."

There is also doubt about whether subsidies can be trimmed without a political or economic fall-out. "Farmers get subsidised irrigation water. Can you really raise the irrigation rates?" asks a government official. Bhalla, a former chairman of the Agricultural Price Commission, is quick to point out that cutting fertiliser subsidies will squeeze farmers. "The demand for food will grow at the rate of 3 to 4 per cent a year. In real terms, Indian farmers pay more for fertilisers than farmers in South East Asia. You just cannot raise prices further."

It is also true that more than one plan has in the past exhorted the Government to widen the tax base and decentralise planning. Indeed, state and district planning boards are to be found in many states. But they've been toothless tigers that never controlled the purse-strings.

That at least could change. Some months ago, an official committee submitted a report recommending pride of place to districts in the planning process, along with separate district budgets. That means that the states would have to break up their budgets. The Centre has held two meetings with the states on this, eliciting mixed reactions. "I suspect that districts will control some resources," says Alagh.

While the jury is still out on that, an effort is underway to change the way plans are constructed. Earlier, government departments set up working groups which then came up with inflated demands for cash. "It was like a shopping list," says one official. "In the last plan, the departmental total came to Rs 320,000 crore, double the actual plan size." The working groups then approached divisions in the Planning Commission, which halved the demands. Planning Commission members saw the final report last. Now they're in on the affair right from the beginning because they head so-called steering groups which fix targets and discuss strategy. "This way, we'll have a more concrete plan than platitudes," said a member.

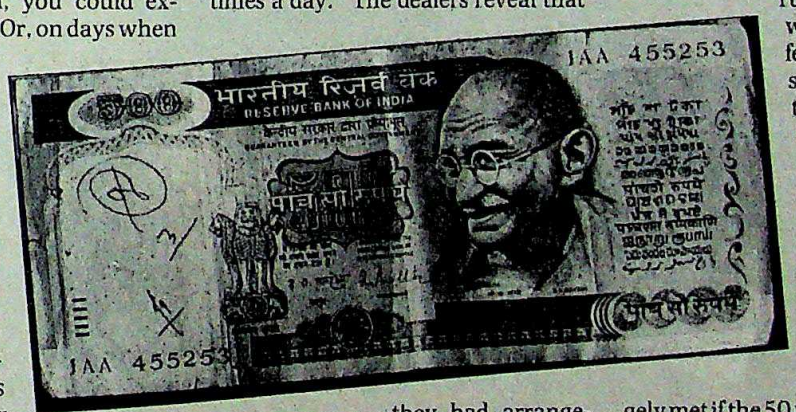
There are miles to go before that can happen. At the end of the day, it's not planners who decide the outcome of any plan, but politicians. And they have to display the will to usher in drastic reform. As of now, there's meagre evidence of any such resolve.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

CURRENCY

Hard Cash

HOW much is a Rs 500 currency note worth? Obviously, Rs 500, you might say. Well, the face value of the paper may be that. But within the precincts of the Reserve Bank of India itself, you could exchange it for Rs 510. Or, on days when demand is particularly high, for Rs 515. So quickly are these notes snapped up that most people have never seen one. "I don't think they are in normal circulation," admits a Reserve Bank official.



All of the five million Rs 500 notes were issued a year back—the first high denomination notes, since these along with Rs 1,000 and Rs 5,000 notes, were demonetised a decade ago. Already, they have been virtually squeezed out of circulation by the demand among black marketeers and smugglers and labour trouble at the mint. The result: even the Reserve Bank has become parsimonious. The counter for Rs 500 notes at the Delhi branch was shut last month and the quarter or so of the notes that remain are now zealously held back.

Bank officials say they haven't entirely stopped issuing the notes. They're just being careful who they give them to. They're still given for railways' salaries. But the common man cannot just walk in and get one.

One note at a time is all he could have got even when the counter was open. But there were ways around that. Bank officials say: "Hirelings of dealers would get into the queue many times a day." The dealers reveal that they had arrangements with bank clerks, who handed them notes for a premium. Such arrangements continue with some bank tellers. "When a naive customer deposits a Rs 500 note, these tellers sell it to us for a premium of Rs 7 to Rs 8," reveals a petty dealer.

The really big fish in the trade operate from poky shops in the busy thoroughfares of Old Delhi. Small-time outstation dealers come here to sell notes, as do local dealers. To buy them come those with black money, or smugglers. While Delhi's dealers mainly have smugglers across the Punjab border as customers, Bombay dealers have a larger market among those with a supply line to the Persian Gulf and beyond.

Another burgeoning market is among travellers to duty-free shoppers' delights such as Dubai and Singapore. Shopkeepers there have apparently begun to accept Indian rupees of late. Those who want to take a few tens of thousands of rupees through customs find the large denomination convenient. One dealer says: "This is the largest group of buyers."

These are special areas of demand which should have been largely met if the 50 million notes printed at the mint at Dewas in Madhya Pradesh could be checked and released. However, the workers' union led by some Congress(I) MPs has held this up, demanding increased pay for printing more valuable notes. Though negotiations have been on for months, "there is a stalemate," admits an official.

If the workers and the Government are equally unhappy at this, one group of people hope for its continuance—the variety of dealers who are having a field day. —DAVID DEVADAS

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MADHYA PRADESH

Torch Bearers

Flashlight units mushroom

IT isn't the sort of town one would normally associate with trade or industry. Situated in the tribal district of Dhar in south-west Madhya Pradesh, Kukshi (population 20,000) is one of those small towns which spring up to cater to the rural population surrounding it.

Transport and communication facilities are minimal. A narrow road, unwinding through hilly terrain, connects the dusty little township to the rest of the world—when rivulets don't inundate its culverts. By sunset every day, traffic on the roads practically comes to a halt because of the plundering Bhil gangs that roam the countryside.

Yet Kukshi is home to a fast-developing rechargeable flashlight industry whose product goes not only to other parts of Madhya Pradesh, but also to many other states. Over the last five years, about 24 small flashlight and its component units have come up in and around Kukshi.

Operating from small rooms at the back of houses, these units produce about one lakh torches a year, with sales of Rs 1.50 crore, and generate employment for about 1,000 people.

The story is all the more remarkable because rechargeable flashlights are a relatively new concept in this country. Instead of using dry cells, which are becoming increasingly expensive, they get power from an accumulator (the sort used by photographers for flash-guns earlier) which can be electrically recharged. Once every fortnight you've merely to plug in the flashlight to the domestic electric socket for a few hours. Caution: keep topping up the distilled water in the accumulator.

Designed basically to help farmers, most of these torches are now being provided with a socket which can be used to operate transistors, tape-recorders and portable TV sets, all of which require six volts of power. Priced from Rs 150 to Rs 200, depending on the model, a torch lasts for five years.

The first prototype of the flashlight was developed about 10 years ago by an inventive farmer of Dhar district, Lakhanlal Kumawat, then 23. Teaming up with a friend, Laxmi Narayan Kag, he borrowed a four-volt accumulator from a photographer and, using a tin body, developed the first torch. The flood of demand from relatives and friends set them on the path of entrepreneurship.

"It was not an easy path," recalls Kumawat, still bitter after his experience. The district industries centre at Dhar wrote a negative note on their application for a bank loan. But an imaginative officer of the Bank of India, overruling the Industries Department, sanctioned a loan of Rs 55,000 to the enterprising duo.

Thus was born in 1981, Kisan Sevika, the first rechargeable flashlight. The four-volt battery, mounted in a plastic body moulded at Baroda, took a battering in the market. Poor publicity, and inept marketing ruined the firm.

But the idea survived, and flourished. The rechargeable flashlight was modified, using a six-volt accumulator to provide more light. Gradually, several manufacturers came up at Indore, the state's commercial capital. But Kukshi remains the industry's home.

Photographs by VIMAL GUPTA

Workers at a rechargeable flashlight unit at Kukshi (top); and Lakhanlal Kumawat: a success story

Most of these small units require an investment of less than Rs 1 lakh and provide direct employment to 20 to 30 persons. They procure the plastic body of the torch and some components from suppliers and manufacturers in New Delhi, Baroda and Indore.

Apart from generating a large number of jobs, the industry and its ancillaries have changed the face of this backward town. For instance, the town is served by an irregular bus service, but now has half a dozen taxis which are hired to transport the torches to other towns.

What the industry needs is probably a little help in obtaining raw materials, which are always in short supply. Dhar being an industrially backward district, new units get sales tax exemption and 25 per cent capital subsidy. But it's not possible to get these benefits without registration. "The Industries Department officials want a bribe for registration," said the owner of one such unit.

Bureaucracy, however, has failed to kill the spirit of enterprise. In a dingy house at Barwani, Khargone district, Kumawat is still experimenting. He has already developed a prototype of a 12-volt flashlight and is now trying to design a flashlight operated by solar batteries. Clearly, Kukshi is determined to throw light on one phenomenon: entrepreneurship is not the monopoly of big towns.

—N.K. SINGH in Kukshi and Barwani

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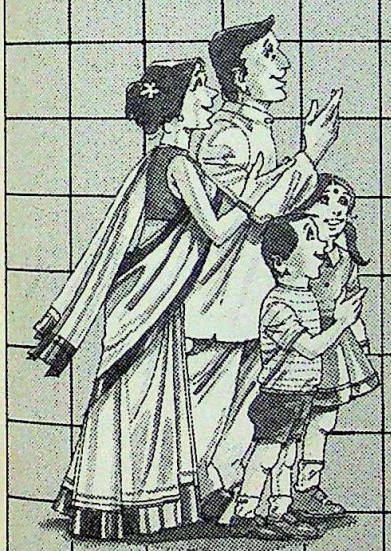
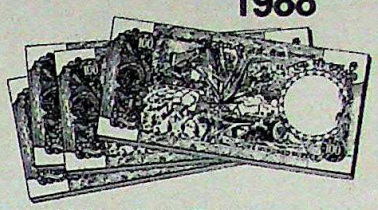
Bonus to policyholders climbs a higher peak.



1988



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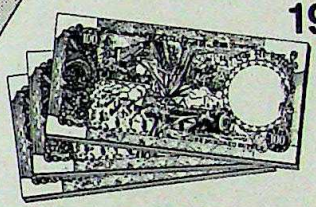

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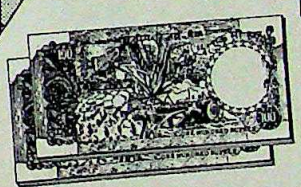
1986



Whole Life Policies
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Endowment Policies
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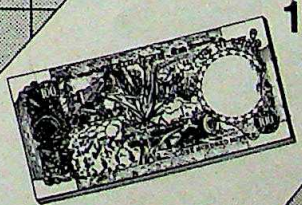
1985



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LEASING COMPANIES

In the Dumps

Rates dip amidst competition

MORE than three years ago, there was a distinct air of excitement as a new financial service industry was born. In quick succession, an estimated 300 leasing companies set up shop. Their scrips commanded fancy prices on the stock-market. The good times, it seemed, would never end.

But end they have, and with a bang. Many leasing concerns are dormant, and prices of their shares have nosedived (*see chart*). What's more, lease rates have slumped in a cut-throat market, from around Rs 29 for equipment worth Rs 1,000 five years ago to Rs 24.50 or less today. "Yes, leasing rates have certainly come down," says S. Nagarajan, chief executive of the Madras-based Ashok Leasing and Hire Purchase.

A major cause is the entry of the state-owned financial institutions and banks into the leasing business. "With the entry of the public sector, companies like ours can no longer overcharge," admits Raj Sujan, president of the Calcutta-based Classic Financial Services and Enterprises. "This has brought down the effective yield from leasing."

As a result, leasing concerns are furiously diversifying into a gamut of activities such as hire purchase, consumer credit, merchant banking, even manufacturing foods and juices. "Diversification is the game leasing companies are looking at," says Harish Bhasin, who heads the Delhi-based HB Leasing. Bhasin's company now transports gas for the Indian Oil Corporation and has its eyes set on hi-tech projects.

What soured the Great Leasing Dream? Fly-by-night operators and a dearth of funds, for one. "Taking advantage of the stock-market boom, many firms raised money from the public but diverted it to other areas," explains V.S. Srinivasan, executive director of the Bombay-based 20th Century Finance Corporation. "So when share prices fell, people lost confidence. Now they don't want to invest in leasing companies."

There are other reasons too for the investor disenchantment. A heavier tax burden is built into the leasing business, simply because the depreciation available on assets drops over time. "Taxes go up after some time. In the first year, a leasing company gets 33.3 per cent depreciation on the equipment it's bought, the next year another 33.3 per cent on the remainder and so on," points out P. Bhalla, director and company secretary at the Delhi-based Goetze (India).

An amendment to the Income Tax Act in 1987 did not help bottom lines either. It allowed tax write-offs for companies only if they sold a block of assets at a loss, instead of individual pieces of equipment. (Leasing concerns usually sell equipment to customers for a notional price after the lease period is over; the net effect is a book loss.) The new stipulation meant they couldn't get tax write-offs unless they hawked all their available equipment for lease—which would have put them out of business. The result was higher tax liabilities.

Even when leasing concerns raised money from the public, the dividends made it an expensive proposition. That in turn kept lease rentals high, ensuring that the market didn't grow rapidly enough to accommodate all those vying for a share of the leasing pie.

Compounding the problem now is the reluctance of banks to lend cash to leasing concerns after some defaulted on loan repayments. "We've more or less stopped financing leasing companies," confirms Naina Lal, manager at Grindlays Bank in Delhi. To a business that's fuelled by cash, this is catastrophic.

The Government too has contributed to the poor showing on the leasing front. The reintroduction of the investment allowance has encouraged the corporate sector to buy equipment, rather than lease it. As Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) Chairman N. Vaghul says: "Most people would like to own their assets rather than lease them. They prefer to book depreciation and get the benefit of investment allowance."

But the proverbial last straw was the competition from public sector financial institutions such as ICICI and the State Bank of India. While they can rustle up cash by paying interest of 10 per cent or less, leasing companies have to fork out interest of 16.5 per cent or more for their funds, depending on whether the money comes from the banks or the public.

Clearly, the institutions can easily undercut the competition—and leasing companies charge them with doing just this. Srinivasan of 20th Century cites the example of a Rs 5-crore leasing deal his company had nearly sewed up in 1984. "We signed an agreement at the then existing rate of Rs 26.50. But suddenly ICICI dropped its rate to Rs 23.50."

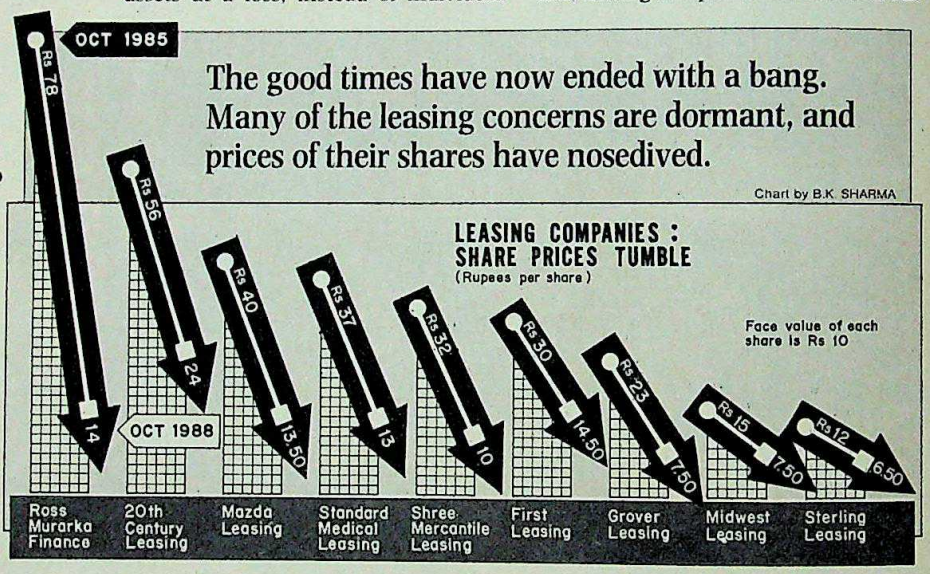
Vaghul, however, insists this isn't true. "Charges that we've reduced our rates are untrue. We've kept our rates consistent at Rs 23.50 per thousand."

Amidst these claims and counter-claims, what is very clear is that the industry's outlook remains bleak, even if a few of the big boys are faring well. "Leasing is a dying industry worldwide," argues Lal of Grindlays. The question is: will it die here too?

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

The good times have now ended with a bang. Many of the leasing concerns are dormant, and prices of their shares have nosedived.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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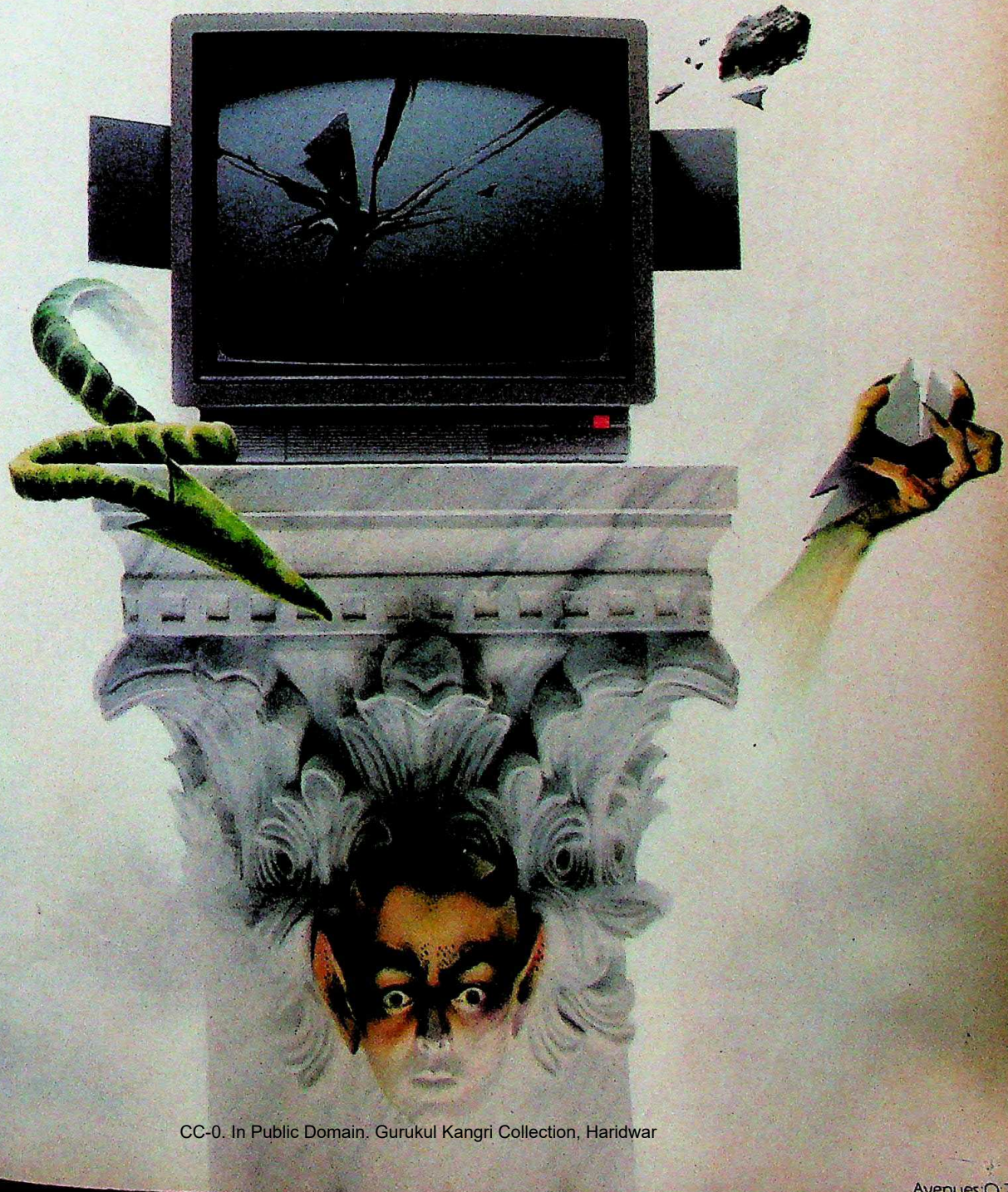

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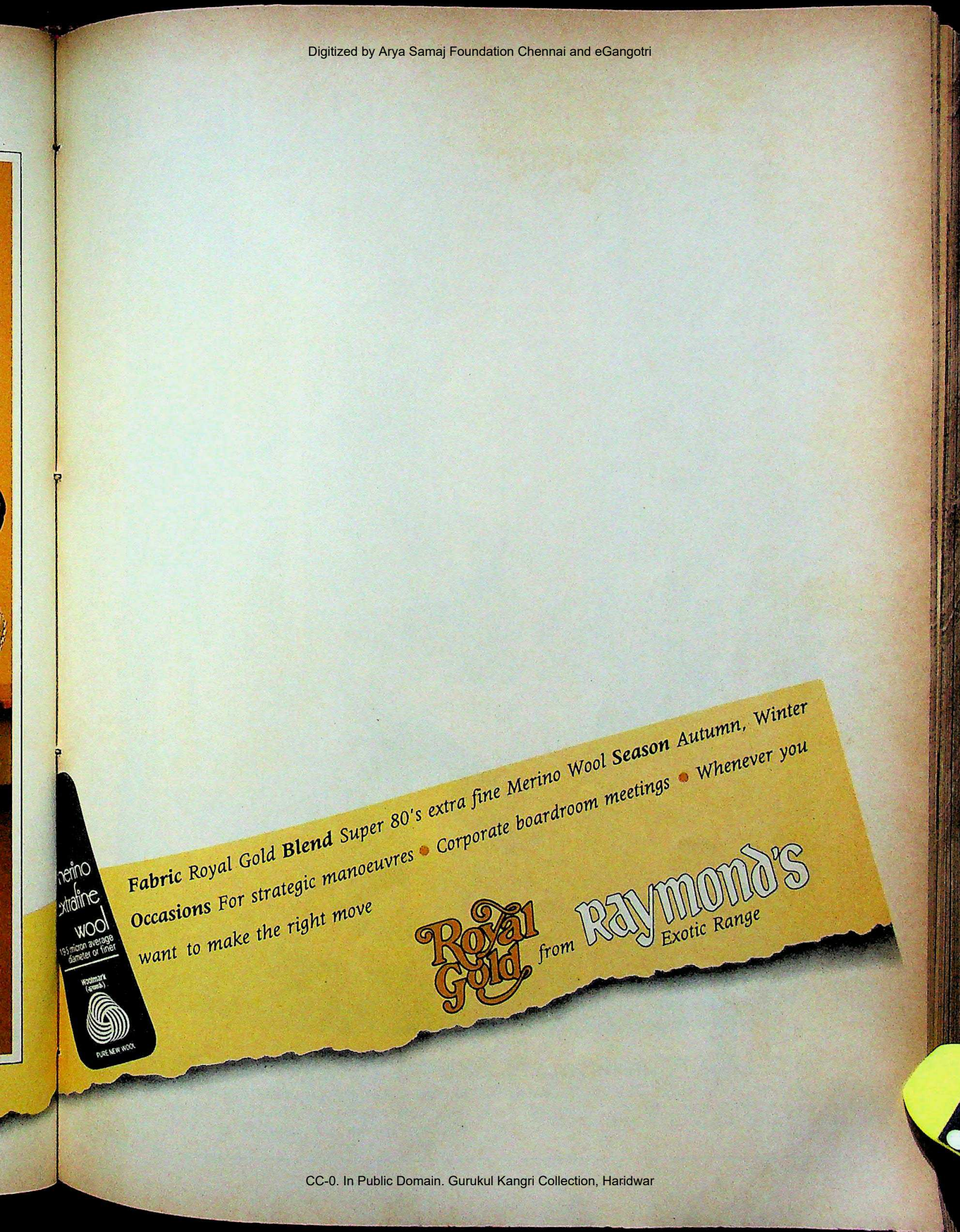

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GTC

The Call of Duty

The Government turns on the heat

IT had all the elements of a financial pot-boiler: excise and income tax sleuths scurrying across the country for evidence, top company functionaries being summoned for interrogation, court cases galore, a tax official investigating the case being charged with attempted rape, and taxmen being transferred or told to halt investigations.

Yet after more than six years of bureaucratic dithering, the Government is turning the heat on GTC Industries. The Rs 265-crore cigarette manufacturer and some of its suppliers are accused of having evaded excise duty totalling almost Rs 200 crore. Last fortnight, excise officials were contemplating further stringent action against GTC.

That will only top some tough steps taken earlier. Some months ago, excise officials grilled Chairman Sanjay Dalmia in the capital for six hours on the excise evasion charges GTC faces. Dalmia steadfastly maintained that he was non-executive chairman of GTC and so unaware of day-to-day administrative matters in GTC units. But he promised that GTC would punish anyone in the company who had violated excise laws.

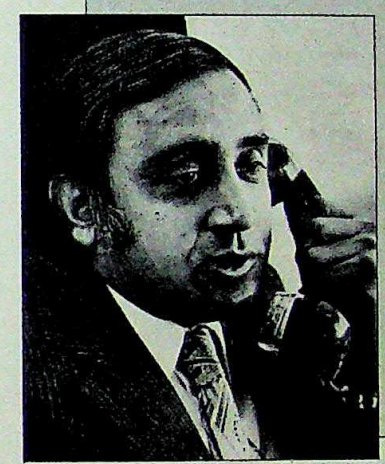
Nevertheless, income tax officials in Bombay have added to the company's cup of woes. Last March an income tax appraisal report alleged that GTC made an additional income of Rs 33 crore for the assessment year 1984-85. The Dalmia enterprise claimed that this came from commissions earned as a middleman in deals between several Indian companies. But the Government maintains that the principals to the deals have denied that GTC played any role at all in them. Rightly or wrongly, the Government now suspects that GTC was laundering black money.

As if that was not enough, two months ago the Jammu & Kashmir High Court dismissed a GTC petition arguing that Central excise laws did not extend to the state. So GTC may have to fork out a few crore in excise dues. Also in the official firing line is North Eastern Tobacco (NET), based at Variengte in Mizoram, that made cigarettes for GTC. Excise men in Shillong issued NET a notice at the end of last April alleging that it had evaded excise of Rs 16 lakh. They set a one-month deadline to reply to the notice. The deadline has long expired, but excise officials claim that the company failed to submit a reply.

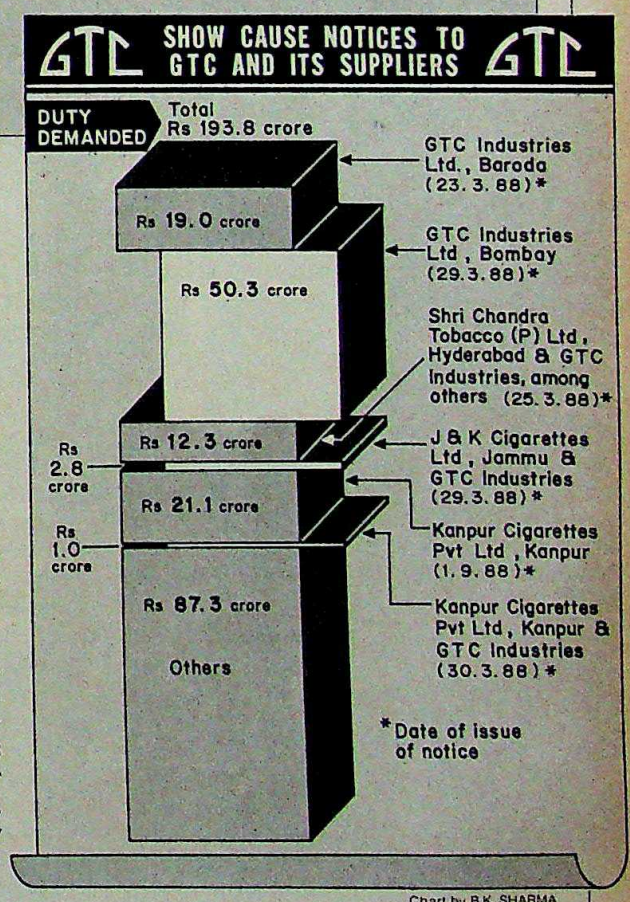
Clearly, the Government is gunning for the country's second largest tobacco company. In the process, it has focused its attention on the NET affair. A year ago, excise men had intercepted the Mizoram company's truck on the ground that it was transporting Panama Virginia cigarette packets with fake excise labels suggesting that duty had been paid (INDIA TODAY, December 31, 1987). GTC produced a certificate—which NET obtained—from the then commissioner of excise and taxes in Mizoram to the effect that Central excise laws do not apply to the state. Said a senior excise official: "If they had succeeded in setting up a unit in Mizoram, they could have manufactured cigarettes at rates which no other competitor would've been able to match. So they would have surely shifted their entire production lines there." The Central Government says that its excise laws cover Mizoram, and the matter is now before the Guwahati High Court.

However, GTC has consistently maintained that it had only a technical collaboration with NET. Contacted over the telephone, Sanjay Dalmia declined to comment on these matters, but said: "We only have a technical collaboration with NET, nothing more. They supplied us cigarettes while we provided them with expertise to manufacture cigarettes. It is an independent company."

But after a four-month-long investigation, excise men claim that this is not at all true; that NET was a front through which Dalmia's company conducted business; and that they have conclusive proof of this.



For the first time, Chairman Sanjay Dalmia was grilled in the capital for six hours on the excise evasion charges the company faces.



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As set out in official documents, the Government's contention is that GTC conceived of a plan to set up a new cigarette factory at Vairengte in May 1987. Excise men seized a project report from a GTC office in Bombay and believe that the word victory, which appears in the report, referred to Vairengte. As local laws permit only Mizos to open businesses in the state, GTC—or so taxmen claim—floated NET with two Mizos as its owners. The Government alleges that the Mizos were not the true owners; that other than signing an agreement with GTC the two men were not associated with setting up NET; that the agreement was a one-sided affair with full control of the factory resting with GTC. Under the terms of the agreement, NET was not allowed to make or enter into agreements to make cigarettes that were not GTC brands. NET could not market GTC brands without GTC's written permission or even sell rejects.

The Government goes on to claim that GTC ensured that most of NET's output was marketed by a wholly-owned GTC subsidiary Golden Investment (Sikkim) Pvt Ltd (GISL); that far from being a technical collaboration, GTC arranged finance to set up the NET factory; that GISL had sanctioned a loan of Rs 10 lakh for this purpose. Moreover, government documents maintain that GISL Director P.K. Chatterjee had admitted in a statement dated April 15, 1988, that GTC floated NET; that he was aware that excise would not be paid on the cigarettes, citing in this connection a letter he wrote last year to J.P. Khetan, deputy executive director, GTC Industries. In the letter, Chatterjee described a location where cigarettes were to be stocked in Sikkim as ideal but for the close presence of a Central excise office.

There are other pieces of evidence, some even more damaging, all of which are cobbled together to suggest that GTC intended to make cigarettes in Mizoram and sell them without forking out excise—charging the same price as was printed on packets of cigarettes it manufactured elsewhere, and so making huge profits. These are serious charges. Whether they are far-fetched or not will eventually be decided by the courts.

No less serious are the charges levelled at GTC by the income tax authorities. They maintain that GTC claimed that it had received commissions from companies such as Oil and Natural Gas Commission—for supplying a telephone exchange—Flakt India (for help in securing orders from Premier Automobiles and National Aluminium Company Limited). But the tax authorities say they discovered that Premier placed orders directly with Flakt, as did most of the other concerns.

Several questions surface here. Would any company concoct such a bizarre money laundering operation? Surely it would have been aware of the possibility that the tax department's sleuths would do some cross-checking? The charges border on the improbable, but the truth of all this will, once again, be determined by the courts.

The income tax authorities challenge GTC's claim that it received commissions from ONGC and Flakt India for services rendered.

MAHENDRA PAREKH

The investigations into GTC affairs have, meantime, gone through curious twists and turns. Four years ago, four excise evasion cases involving some Rs 70 crore were suddenly transferred from local excise collectorates to the Directorate General of Inspection and Audit (Customs and Central Excise) in New Delhi—where they've been mothballed till today.

More bizarre is the strange case of Ramesh Bhattacharji, additional collector of customs and central excise and a key official investigating the NET case. In a complaint filed on May 27 to Guwahati's Special Judicial Magistrate, G.K. Changmai, Madhubala Baishya, a student, alleged that Bhattacharji had abducted her and attempted to rape her. (Around this time, the excise department had filed a contempt case against GTC for not appearing before Bhattacharji). But the magistrate dismissed Baishya's complaint.

GTC hotly denies having had a hand in the matter, but excise men allege that company lawyers tried to take advantage of the case and moved the Calcutta High Court seeking an adjournment of the contempt case. The court dismissed the petition, and GTC has appealed to a divisional bench against the ruling.

There are two versions of Dalmia's interrogation too. Dalmia says: "I was never summoned for investigations into the Shillong case. They only requested me to come to their office and explain some complicated matters. We had gone to court and asked them not to harass us like this."

But senior excise officials insist that the directorate of anti-evasion in Delhi issued a summons to Dalmia on April 18 asking him to appear before it the next day. Instead, Dalmia petitioned the Delhi High Court on April 19 against having to put in an appearance. The court dismissed the petition and asked him to show up on April 21 before the directorate. Things get a little murky now. Claims a senior directorate official: "Dalmia was admitted to a nursing home in Delhi on April 20 and produced a medical certificate that he was unwell." The directorate moved a contempt of court petition, the court asked Dalmia to appear before the excise officials on May 11, and Dalmia complied.

Again, just how much fire there is in all this smoke is difficult to ascertain. Is the Government harassing GTC? Or is it attempting to bring to book a company that is guilty of many sins? Whichever the case, a giant cigarette enterprise may go up in smoke if all this carries on much longer.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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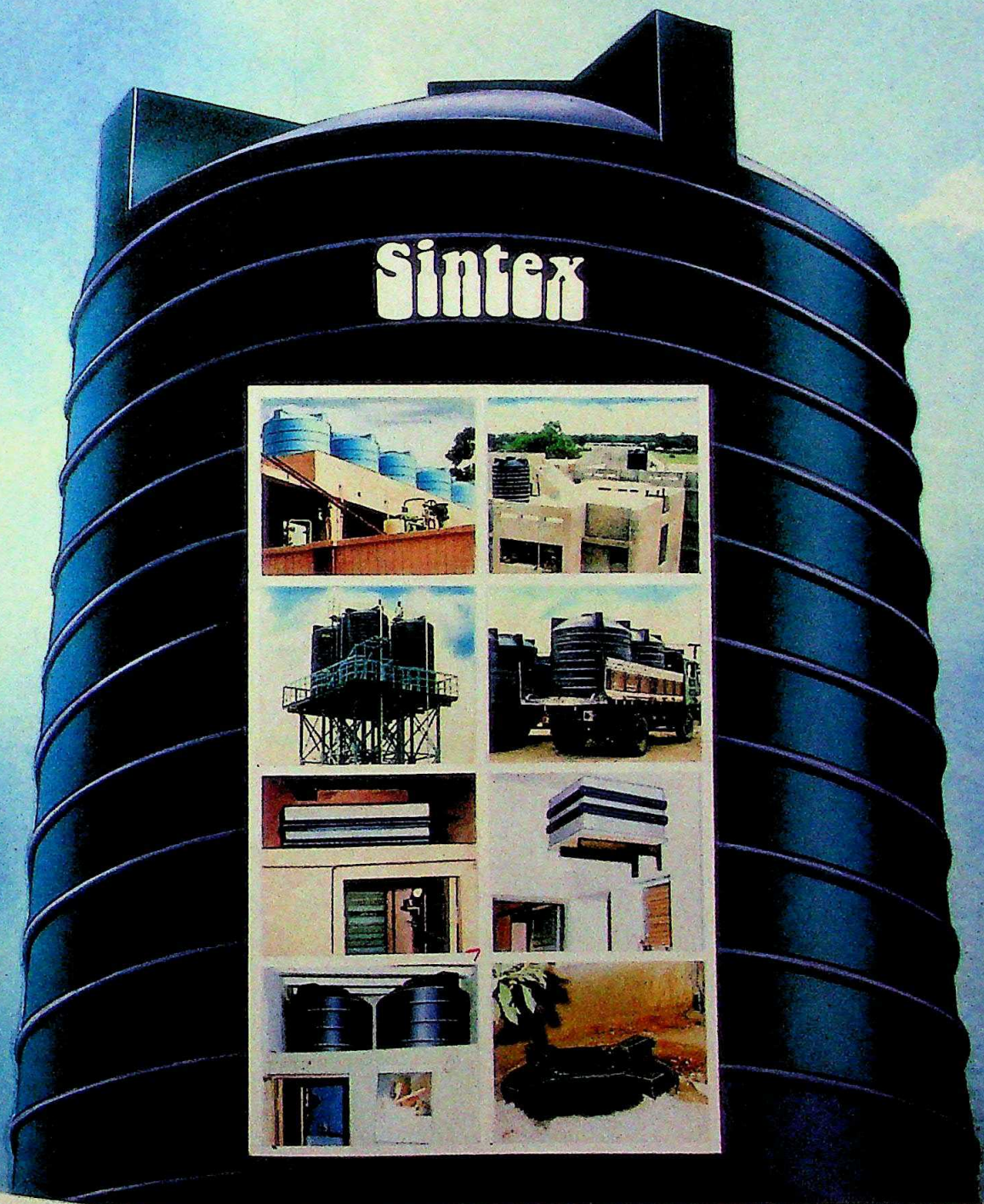

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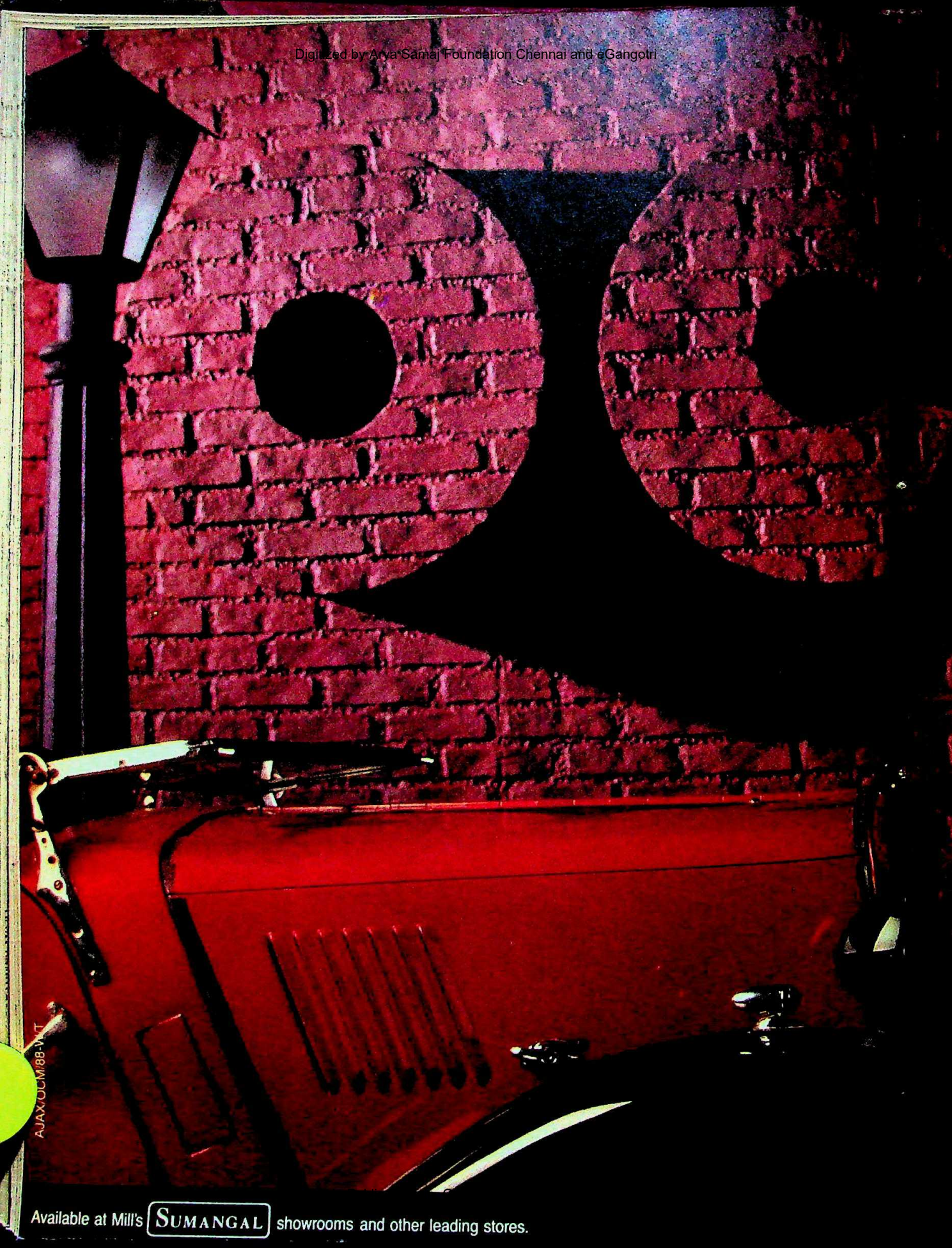

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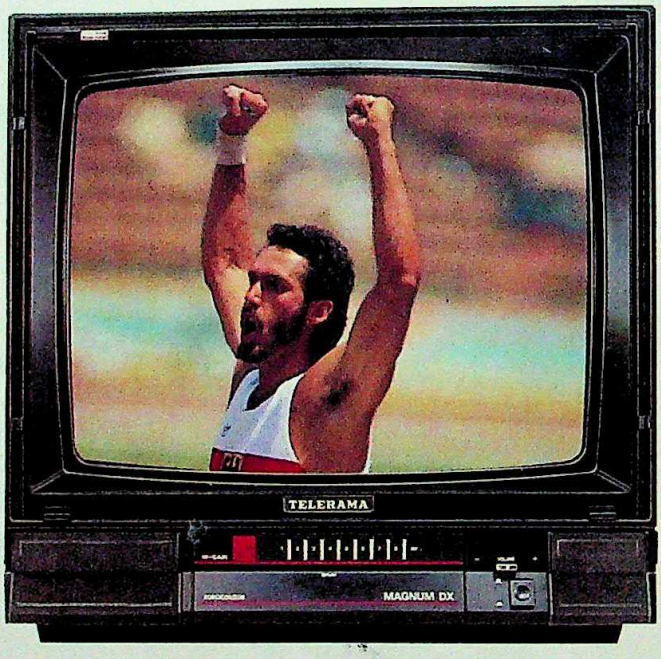

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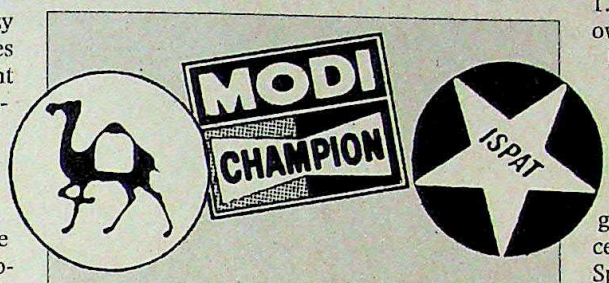
NEW ISSUES

Luring Investors

New share issues experience a heady boom

THE party's started, the frenzy has begun. New companies that once would've thought twice about braving the stock-markets are leaping in and seeing their share issues dramatically over-subscribed.

Indeed, new issues are being quoted again at a premium in the unofficial market, and stockbrokers are gleefully rubbing their hands at the market's robust revival. Says a delighted Ram Piparaiya, managing director of Aridhi Investment Consultants: "Previously we used to get phone calls from clients who wanted to sell shares. Now they all want to buy."



What is really striking is that several new issues command a premium in the unofficial market.

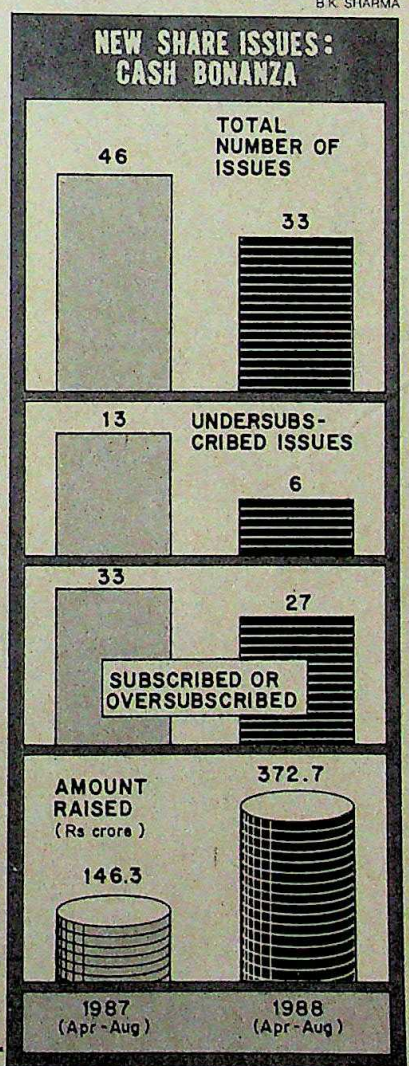
Certainly, the furious buying is reflected in share market indices. Last fortnight, the Bombay Stock Exchange Sensitivity index shot up to a record 676.58, 12 points higher than the all-time high of 664.48 during the pre-budget session of 1986. In fact, the index has soared by 286.58 points from last April. As a result, stock-marketmen reckon that the country's 10 million investors in equity shares are each richer by anywhere from Rs 10,000 to Rs 15,000 in just six months.

But with prices of stocks of established companies hitting the roof, punters have inevitably turned to the market for new issues. Last year, that market was virtually dead, with issue after issue biting the dust.

But in the last five months, virtually every other new issue has sailed through. "In 1987, most issues were either under-subscribed or just sailed through," says Vijay Mehta, president of Mehta Financial Consultants & Management Services and a director of the Delhi Stock Exchange. "Nowadays, almost every project is over-subscribed."

The statistics bolster such assessments. Between April and August 1987, 46 issues garnered just Rs 146.34 crore. In the same period this year, 34 issues brought in Rs 372.81 crore (*see chart*). If the trend continues, the total amount of cash raised from the share market will surpass the Rs 4,200-crore bench-mark of 1985-86—and the pace of industrial investment will inevitably quicken.

B.K. SHARMA



The turn around was spearheaded by Modi Champion and Aban Loyd Chiles Offshore Ltd. Last May, Modi Champion's Rs 1.30-crore issue was over-subscribed seven times. Also in May, Aban Loyd offered stock worth Rs 1.2 crore—and found it 15 times over-subscribed. Come June, the Bombay-based Camlin Ltd's equity issue was over-subscribed 10 times, while Fusion Polymers' Rs 90-lakh issue was over-subscribed 22 times.

By August, the market was going full speed, with new concerns that hit the market such as Spic Electronics and Systems and Ispat Profiles being swamped by share applications. "Over-subscription is a good omen, and the market is bound to boom," says M.R. Mayya, executive director of the Bombay Stock Exchange.

Strikingly, even relatively unpublicised share issues such as Bharat Seats Ltd and Subros Ltd have flourished. And several new issues command a premium in the unofficial market. Last fortnight, the Rs 10-share of Maruti Udyog joint venture Jay Bharat Maruti carried a Rs 8 premium almost immediately after the issue opened.

In a sense, the good times will affect brokers' pockets. They used to obtain an extra 1 to 2 per cent commission over and above the legally permissible commission of 1.5 per cent to cover risks when the market was down. But this loss will be more than offset by the burgeoning business that's coming their way now. "We alone sold Rs 1.5 crore worth of India Glycol scrip," notes Mehta. "Brokers always make money when the market is good."

So new issues, predictably, are quite the rage. But there's a distinct difference between today and the heady boom days of 1985-86. Fewer issues are over-subscribed now: six a fortnight, as against a dozen a day. And Ajit Dayal, consultant to Birla Mercury, the Ashok Birla mutual fund, cautions that all that has really happened is that more money is changing hands and players are playing for bigger stakes: the number of transactions has not changed. "People are only doubling the value of their transactions," says Dayal.

Then, success has usually come only to issues backed by sound managements or well-known promoters. Also, with the exception of the Reliance mega issue, most companies are tapping the capital

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market when they are about to go into production, like Kajaria Ceramics, to reduce both the gestation period and the time by which dividends will be paid. Says Bhupen Dalal, managing director of Champaklal Investment and Financial Consultancy Ltd: "Investors are more selective now." So are merchant bankers: prominent firms indicate they wouldn't touch a leasing, food products or soya issue. "Bankers are now backing managements, not industries," explains Nimesh Kampani, managing director, JM Financial and Investment Consultancy Services.

The lay investor has, in fact, reason to be selective: in 1985-86, he joined the scramble for shares to make a quick buck. "The investor threw reasoning to the winds," says Dalal. But with many new companies quoted below par, the public soon realised that shysters had led it down the garden path. Some investors held on; others, as Piparaiya points out, took a holiday from the stock-market. Meanwhile, the market complexion changed.

What transformed it was the entry of a brand-new player: the mutual fund. The State Bank of India, Canara Bank, and the Unit Trust of India (UTI), along with other financial institutions, were responsible for sustaining the market with their investors' funds, at a time when the market was in the dumps. Says Kampani: "The institutions have consolidated the market and speculators have led it." That may be so, but right now most are optimistic about the market's prospects. The Government has some market magic up its sleeves. A committee on the capital markets headed by Planning Commission member Abid Hussain has submitted a report recommending, among other things, more financial agencies such as UTI and incentives to invest in shares.

Still, some like Dalal prefer discretion to bravado. He quotes a Gujarati saying: wherever there are many misers, scoundrels are not far behind. "The riff-raff are waiting in the wings," he warns. If they leap in, today's euphoria could once more give way to yesterday's gloom.

The saving grace is the investor himself. "The investor is now getting smarter," explains Shitin Desai, director, DSP Financial Consultants. Mayya concurs: "The investor is now wiser. If he's not way laid and shareholders and merchant bankers call the tune properly, then the revival could be long-term."

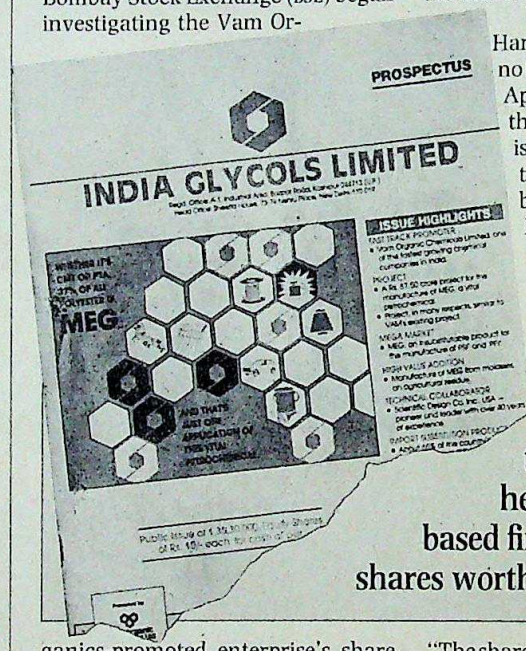
—SALIL TRIPATHI with bureau reports

INDIA GLYCOLS

Crying Foul

THREE months ago, it was the toast of Bombay's stock-market. The Rs 13.53-crore India Glycols equity issue, meant to partly finance a Rs 87-crore mono ethylene glycol project in Uttar Pradesh, had been over-subscribed 11 times.

Last fortnight, however, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) began investigating the Vam Organics-promoted enterprise's share allotment—and halted trading in India Glycols scrips. Said BSE Executive Director M.R. Mayya: "There have been complaints in the past over NRI investments in India, but not in such large numbers."


PROSPECTUS

INDIA GLYCOLS LIMITED

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

MEG

AND THAT'S JUST ONE APPLICATION OF THIS VITAL PETROCHEMICAL

The controversy erupted when brokers for the NRIs complained to the Kanpur and Bombay stock exchanges that the Rs 28-crore company had arbitrarily allotted shares to NRIs, rejecting some applications while accepting others.

Under the terms of the issue, NRIs were entitled to Rs 3-crore worth of Rs 10 shares at face value. Some 5,000 NRIs applied, but India Glycols rejected 746 applications. Fumes a broker: "The scale of rejections has no precedence." Added A.J. Khiwani, a US broker: "The allotment is absolutely arbitrary." They allege applications were turned down to accommodate an application for shares worth Rs 92.31 lakh from a Panama-based firm—which they suspect is a company front.

The NRIs are piqued because they stand to lose around Rs 50 lakh in interest and on account of currency fluctuations (when the issue opened in July, the dollar was worth Rs 14.08; today it's worth Rs 14.60). What's more the share's price has shot up to Rs 30. So the Panama company would have made a cool Rs 1.8 crore, brokers claim.

But India Glycols Director Hari S. Bhartia says: "We have no front company in Panama. Applications were rejected as they were received after the issue was closed (applications sent by a Middle East bank representing 150 NRIs arrived two days late), and because some were either not signed or didn't indicate the NRI's country." Bhartia adds: "The share opened at Rs 25 and is now at Rs 30. I think it's the large returns that are making those who haven't got it feel let down."

Brokers allege that the exercise helped a Panama-based firm to register its shares worth Rs 92.31 lakh.

But brokers contend that thousands of share applications in India would be declared invalid if they were vetted so finely. They also claim to have brought to the BSE's attention two instances of the company having accepted applications that omitted the applicant's age.

While the BSE will decide who's right and who's wrong, more than one NRI is upset. Said California-based Gurcharan Das Meyer, who'd invested Rs 25,000 in India Glycols, over the telephone: "I've lost money in India Glycols. I'm gonna tell other Indians I know to think twice before investing in these NRI schemes." Clearly, India Glycols will remain in the news—for all the wrong reasons.

—SALIL TRIPATHI with bureau reports

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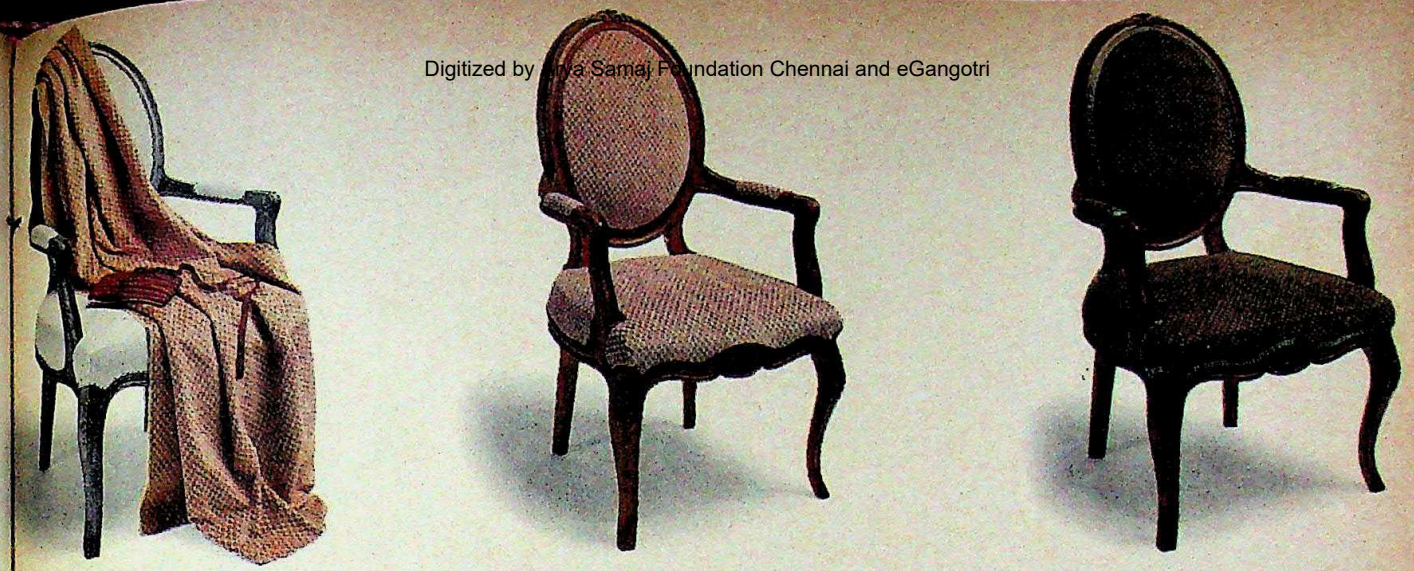
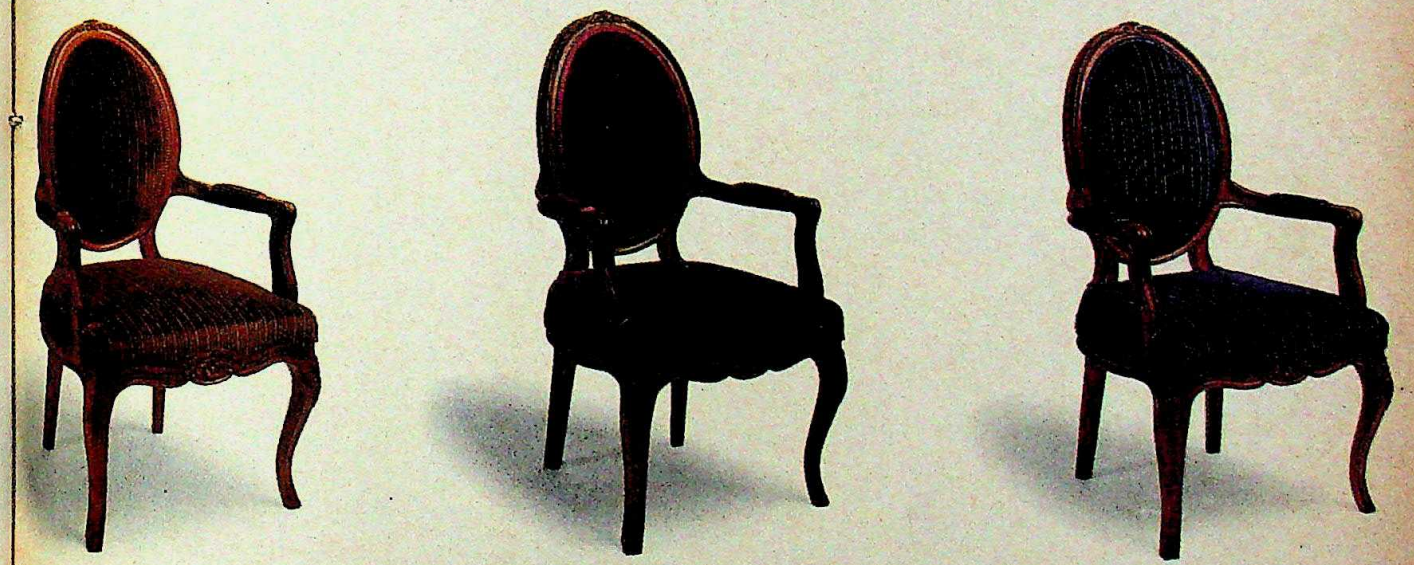


FINISHING TOUCHES



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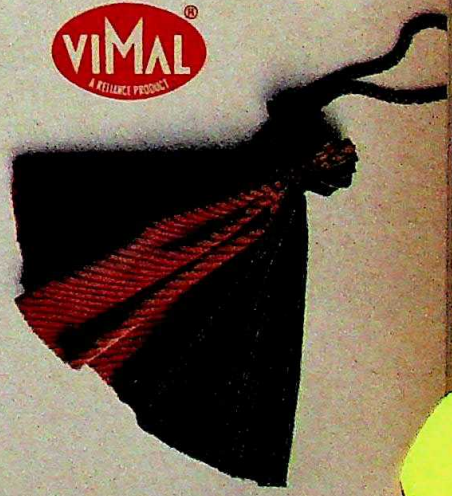

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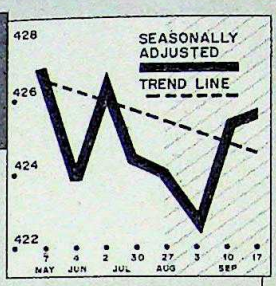
The stock-market remained highly optimistic, draining funds out of gold bullion which fell sharply. Industrial output increased last month mainly because of a sharp rise in hydel power generation. Money supply and credit conditions also eased last fortnight which will help industry but later it may put a longer term pressure on prices.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71=100

Current Trend
−1.3% p.a.

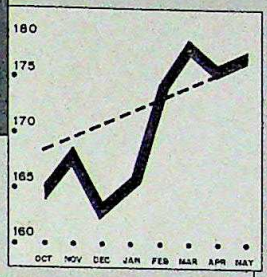


After a period of stability, prices were a cause for concern: wholesale prices went up by 0.7 per cent last fortnight.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81=100

Current Trend
8% p.a.

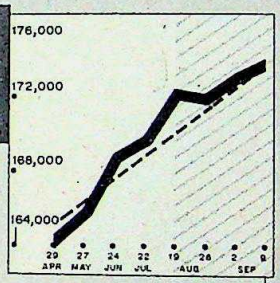


Industrial production rose by 0.7 per cent last month. There was a 6.25 per cent increase in production in mining.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
13.96% p.a.

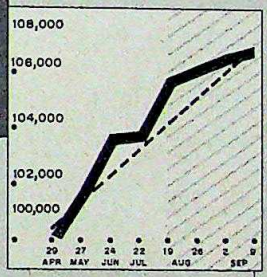


Money supply increased by 1.1 per cent during the last fortnight. If this rate continues it will cause prices to increase after a time lag.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.2% p.a.

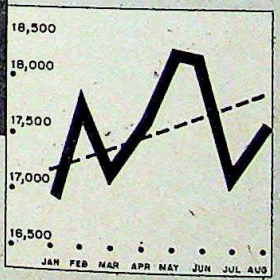


There is a long-term tightening of credit to the commercial sector, although last fortnight it increased by 0.6 per cent.

Electricity Generation

Million Kwh

Current Trend
6.8% p.a.

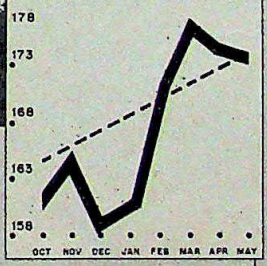


Thermal power generated dropped by 7 per cent. But hydel generation rose by 29.7 per cent. So the total increased by 2.4 per cent over last month.

Manufacturing Index

1980-81

Current Trend
9.6% p.a.

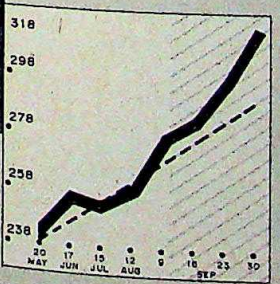


Although the manufacturing output fell by 0.5 per cent the long-term trend is, however, still healthy.

Share Price Index

1984-85=100

Current Trend
54.3% p.a.



Bullish sentiments are very strong in the share market. Share prices rose by 11.6 per cent over the last fortnight.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
2.3% p.a.

It is observed that gold prices reversed direction sharply by nearly 3 per cent over the last fortnight.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the 1st fortnight of September, 1988

	% Growth
Cables & Wires	39.29
Bananas	33.02
Oranges	17.45
Chillies	6.84
Pesticides & Insecticides	6.00
Cashew Nuts	5.20
Ground Nuts	4.30
Gingelly Seed	3.65
Gingelly Oil	2.99
Iron Ore	2.43
Groundnut Oil Cake	2.32
Solvent Extracted Oil	2.14
Milk	2.06
Rubber	1.70
Logs Timber Bamboo	1.54
Maize	1.50
Gur	1.48
Pet Crude and Natural Gas	1.44
Meat	1.34
Copper and Alloys	1.33
Coal	1.24
Tea	1.16
Bolts & Nuts	0.98
Maida	0.98
Pig Iron	0.96
Aluminium	0.89
Plywood	0.88
Machine Tools	0.86
Rails	0.84
Bars & Rods	0.77
Ghee	0.75
Vanaspati	0.75
Nitrogenous Fertilisers	0.73
Electricity	0.71
Jowar	0.70
Cotton Seed	0.70
Masoor	0.70
Industrial Instruments	0.67
Mining & Machinery	0.67
Trucks	0.65
Wheat	0.60
Tapioca	0.60
Woollen Cloth & Woollen Khadi	0.60
Tobacco & other Tobacco Products	0.56
Cigarettes	0.55

Of the 139 series considered, 44 of them with total weight of 28.479 had a negative growth and 99 of them with a total weight of 57.499 had a positive growth. 109 of them showed no growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, August	13016	12236
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, August	737.5	680.7
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, August	3298	3186
Fertilisers		
Thousand Tonnes, August	786.2	569.7
Revenue Earning Goods Traffic		
Million Tonnes, August	22.71	22.28

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INDU

INDU B & W Roll Film and Bromide Papers

Sista's – HPF.958 88 E

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Sobhagya-8/87

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IDBI Capital Bonds
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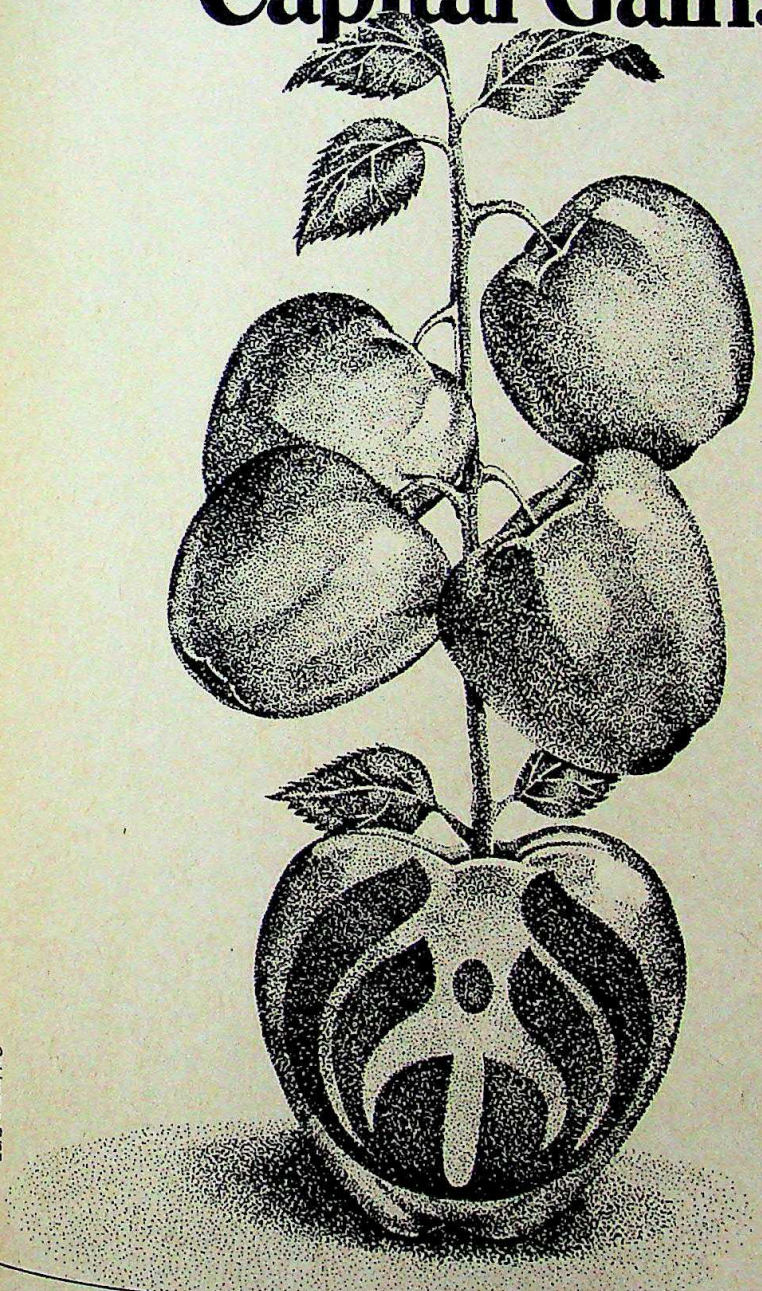

Sobhagiya-B/87

IDBI offers for sale a new series of 3 year bonds. Amounts invested in the bonds are eligible for claiming exemption from capital gains tax under section 54 E of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Other benefits available for investments in the Bonds are **non-deduction of tax at source** on interest paid on the bonds; **exemption from Wealth Tax** (under section 5(1) xvie of the Wealth Tax Act, 1957) and **Income Tax benefit under Section 80L.**

Individuals, HUFs, Firms and Companies are eligible to invest in the bonds. The bonds can be applied for at any time and are available throughout the year. Applications have to be for a minimum amount of Rs. 1000 and in multiples thereof. (Outstation cheques are also accepted and cost of collection of the cheques will be borne by IDBI.)

The bonds carry interest at **9% p.a. payable half yearly.** Interest coupons for the entire 3 year period of investment will be given at the time of investment itself.

At the investor's option, **interest for the full period of 3 years could be paid in advance on discounted basis.** Under this option, the investor will receive for every Rs. 1000 invested, an amount of Rs. 235 by way of interest payment soon after investment.

For further details contact the nearest IDBI office or write to Manager.
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Jolly Maker Chambers No. 2 225, Vinay K. Shah Marg, Nariman Point, Bombay 400 021.

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THE MARKETS

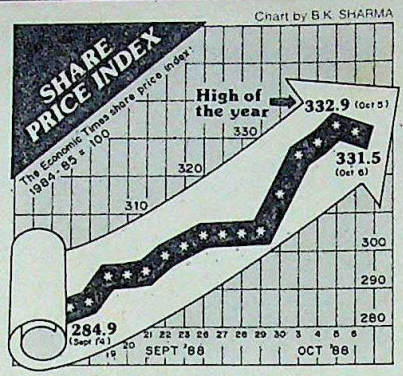
Scaling Peaks

Share prices touch new highs

THESE are tumultuous times on the country's stock-markets. The bulls are sallying forth in full strength. Last fortnight, share prices scaled new peaks, sometimes in rapid bursts. This was the case not only with the more popular scrips, but also shares that were not usually in the limelight (Hindustan Lever, Indian Rayon, Modi Rubber, Garware Polyester). The upward surge carried along with it even shares that are midway on the market's totem pole: Ashok Leyland, Asian Paints, Mahindra and Mahindra, Wimco and Zenith.

In line with the unprecedented tumult, share price indices went through the roof. In 15 days, *The Economic Times* share price index gained an incredible 46.6 points, rising from 284.9 on September 14 to peak at 332.9 on October 5 before dropping to 331.5 the next day.

Another measure of the boom is the performance of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) index of 30 scrips, which had been largely dormant after the stock exchange authorities restricted trading in Reliance Industries shares to a spot-delivery basis. On October 2, the BSE index scored an all-time high of 676.58 (the previous record was registered in pre-budget trading in 1986). And then it climbed still further over the next two days to 686.97.



Inevitably, the price spurt raises the question—is it fuelled by speculation? According to some brokers, it is—but to a limited extent. What is really propelling the market now is the sustained buying by the financial institutions and the mutual funds, and favourable corporate results. On October 6, for example, the Orkay Silk Mills management increased the dividend from Rs 2 to Rs 2.10 per share, on a higher share capital. In fact, Orkay has given away over two-thirds of its earnings per share of a bit under Rs 3. Escorts has announced a 32.5 per cent increase in sales, from Rs 287 crore to Rs 380 crore, for the first 8 months of its current 15-month year. The management of Kinetic Engineering is considering a bonus issue for shareholders, while the conservative Century Enka has decided to declare an interim dividend now following better prospects for the company.

Even industries that had been in the dumps are faring better. Light commercial vehicle sales have gradually moved up from 22,554 last year to 27,000 this year. And although car sales in the first seven months of the year have marginally dropped, both Hindustan Motors and Premier Automobiles report a higher offtake of their vehicles.

Against this backdrop, the equity boom seems very real. But the market is overheated and may dip a bit. The next fortnight should be revealing.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 5.10.88	Change in Fortnight	
Ashok Leyland	60.00	30.25	57.50	6.50	+
Associated Cement	278.00	128.50	263.50	0.50	+
Atlas Copco	65.00	33.50	62.00	10.50	+
Asian Paints	200.00	128.75	195.00	20.00	+
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	341.25	51.25	+
Baroda Rayon	345.00	140.00	330.00	30.00	+*
Bata India	77.25	50.50	73.50	4.50	+
Bharat Forge	163.75	101.00	161.25	15.25	+
Birla Jute	50.00	32.25	49.00	1.00	+
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	45.00	7.00	+
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	133.00	14.00	+
Britannia Ind.	117.00	75.00	116.00	23.50	+
Brooke Bond	120.50	75.00	118.50	16.50	+
Century Spinning	1240.00	617.50	1230.00	190.00	+
Chloride India	80.50	59.00	76.00	8.00	+
Colgate	297.50	160.00	291.25	25.00	+
Cyanamid	65.00	33.00	60.00	nil	
DCM	51.00	28.00	49.00	6.88	+
Dunlop	86.50	66.00	81.00	10.00	+
E.I. Hotels	60.00	38.00	52.50	0.50	+
Escorts	71.50	37.00	67.00	11.00	+
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	332.50	45.00	+
Food Specialities	174.00	93.50	168.50	15.00	+
Garware Nylon	56.00	20.00	51.00	6.00	+
G.E. Shipping	36.50	20.80	35.75	3.50	+
Gujarat St Fertilisers	172.00	75.00	168.00	7.00	+
Grasim Ind.	118.00	81.50	114.00	6.00	+
Hind. Aluminium	139.00	73.00	113.00	7.00	+*
Hind. Ciba	650.00	332.50	650.00	85.00	+
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	116.25	17.25	+
Hindustan Lever	88.00	59.50	85.50	12.50	+
Hindustan Motors	29.25	15.80	27.90	1.20	+
IEL	47.50	31.00	44.75	6.25	+
Indian Organic	46.50	15.00	46.50	15.00	+
Indian Rayon	80.50	46.00	78.00	8.50	+
Indrol	253.75	133.75	253.75	40.00	+
Ingersoll-Rand	340.00	205.00	340.00	17.50	+
ITC	56.00	30.00	54.50	5.00	+**
J.K. Synthetics	86.50	45.50	83.50	8.00	+
Kinetic Engineering	290.00	161.25	267.50	10.00	+
Kirloskar Cummins	88.75	48.00	83.75	13.75	+
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	295.00	10.00	+
Larsen & Toubro	140.50	75.50	140.00	16.50	+
Lipton	76.00	52.00	74.00	6.50	+
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	13.50	0.50	+
Madura Coats	85.00	59.00	83.50	4.50	+
Mahindra & Mahindra	103.00	48.50	103.00	25.00	+
Milk Food	230.00	72.50	221.25	8.75	+
Motor Industries	670.00	447.50	660.00	20.00	+
Mukand Iron	114.00	72.50	110.00	16.00	+
National Organic	810.00	390.00	810.00	145.00	+
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	11.25	0.75	+
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	40.50	7.75	+
Peico Electronics	37.00	24.50	37.00	8.25	+
Pfizer	79.50	50.00	70.00	9.00	+
Premier Auto	48.50	23.00	45.75	10.75	+
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	81.25	9.75	+
Raymond	96.00	41.50	60.00	1.00	+
Reckitt & Colman	227.00	120.00	152.00	18.00	+
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	191.00	4.00	–***
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	69.50	12.00	+
Shriram Fibres	62.50	32.50	53.00	1.50	+
Siemens India	92.50	56.00	90.00	5.00	+
SKF Bearings	1950.00	1058.00	1940.00	300.00	+
SPIC	60.25	23.50	53.00	4.75	+
Tata Steel	946.25	568.75	940.00	28.75	+
Telco	782.50	340.00	772.50	35.00	+
Vam Organic	115.00	75.00	114.00	21.00	+
Voltas	500.00	225.00	440.00	5.00	–
Wimco	24.00	11.00	23.50	4.00	+

*Ex-right **Ex-dividend ***Spot delivery

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	11.7240	11.5770
Austria	Schilling	1	1.1267	1.1094
Bahrain	Dinar	1	39.0918	39.0000
Bangladesh	Taka	100	47.2122	47.0926
Canada	Dollar	1	12.2006	12.0534
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.0584	2.0323
Egypt	Pound	1	6.9326	6.8928
France	Franc	1	2.3585	2.2962
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.8862	1.8636
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0860	0.08000
Iran	Rial	100	20.6223	20.5430
Italy	Lira	100	1.0400	1.0000
Japan	Yen	100	11.1982	10.9170
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.7962	0.7332
Kuwait	Dinar	1	51.0230	50.6922
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.4914	5.4267
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0429	1.0000
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6426	0.6002
Netherlands	Guilder	1	7.0199	6.9315
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8122	0.7422
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.2302	7.1422
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1200	0.1171
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4500	0.4100
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.3100	2.2795
Switzerland	Franc	1	9.3133	9.1989
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1368	0.1215
Thailand	Baht	100	57.7622	57.6922
UK	Pound	1	24.8756	24.7402
USA	Dollar	1	14.7384	14.5666
UAE	Dirham	1	3.9860	3.9010
USSR	Rouble	1	16.8969	16.2960
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	8.0321	7.8309

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 6.10.88.

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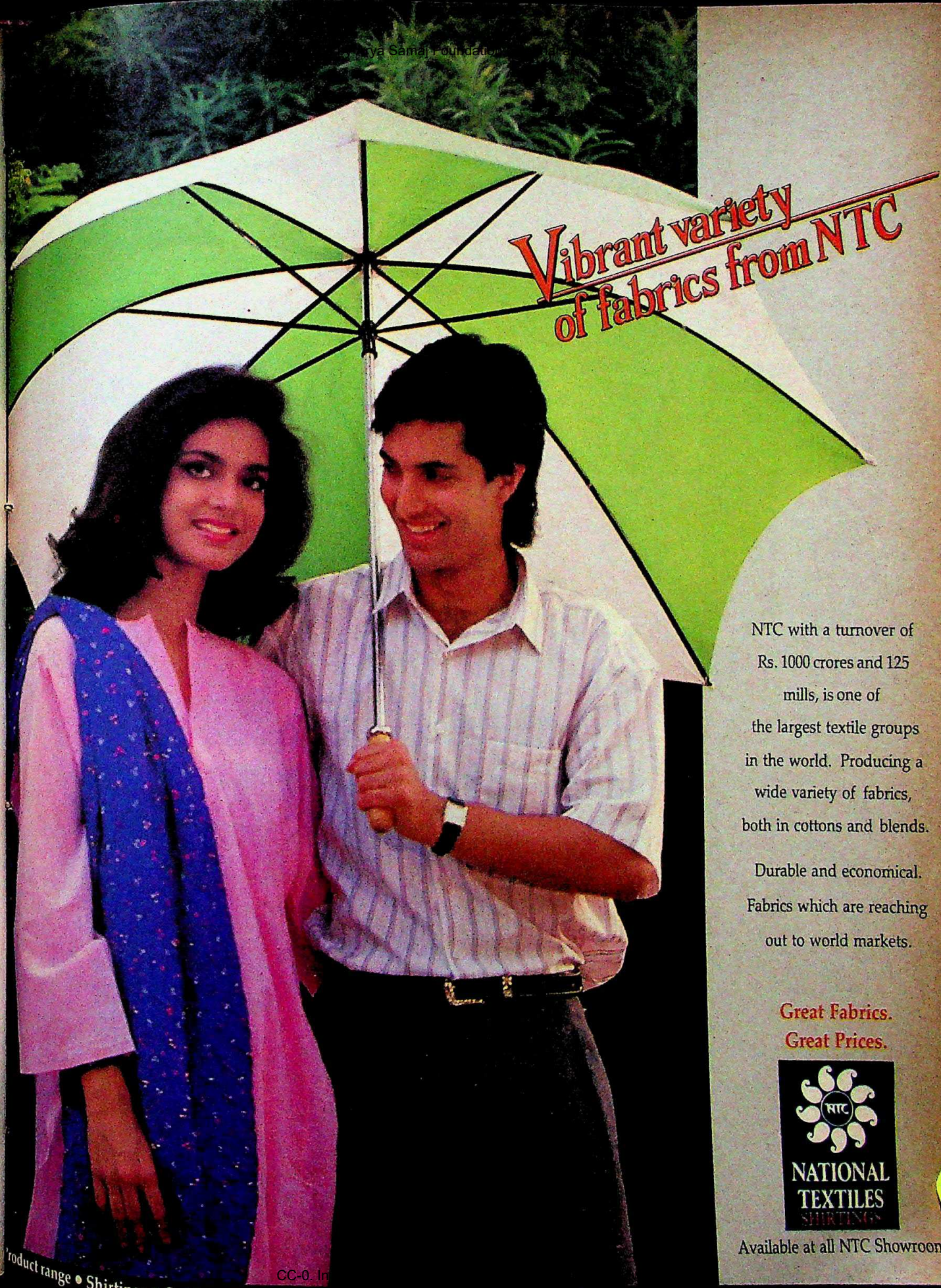

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PAINTING

Age of the Unknown Artists

For a new set of artists, it now seems like big times

THE dark horse has slipped into the art race. Until recently, only the thorough breds reached the winning post—and the sweepstakes. Today, coming up from behind is a new generation of artists who have, after long hard years of struggle, reached the green fields of success.

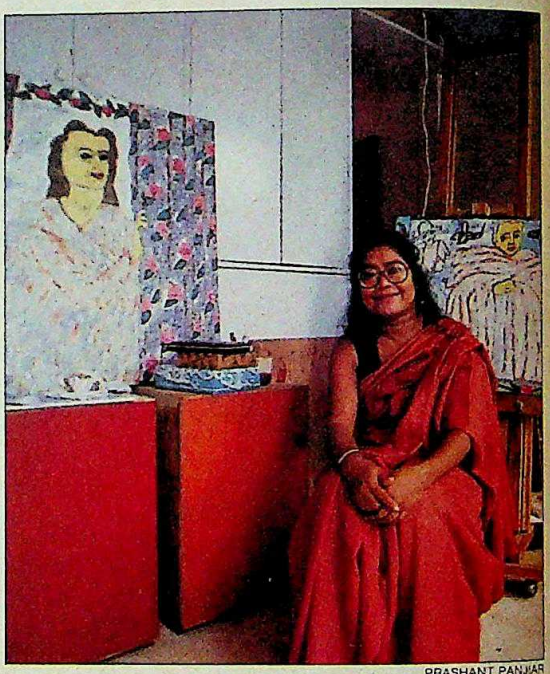
This new breed—some fresh out of art schools—has begun to sell well, sell a lot, and become conversation pieces. Says Arun Sachev, the new impressario of the art world and the director of Bombay's dynamic and fast-growing Gallery 7 (reported annual turnover: Rs 1 crore): "The older artists, the big names had become complacent. They weren't showing any dynamism. They were just sitting on their laurels. But people like Arpita Singh, Sheela Gowda, Pushpamala, Navjot, B.V. Suresh really created a sensation. Their work was snapped up."

Something new and exciting has begun to happen in India's fragmented art world. It is now, however fleeting, the age of the unknown artist. They have come from every where. Interestingly enough, many of them are from the south, transiting through the Baroda School on their way to the limelight. Listing them all would be rather difficult. Choosing a few even more so. But take Navjot, the intense Bombay painter almost unheard of outside Bombay and the art circles. During the now-legendary Christie's auction in India, she overtook almost all the big names when her painting went for Rs 85,000. When her near-pointilist studies of the world of working class children done with Hogarthian intensity, were exhibited at Bombay's Gallery 7, her oils were sold on the opening day.

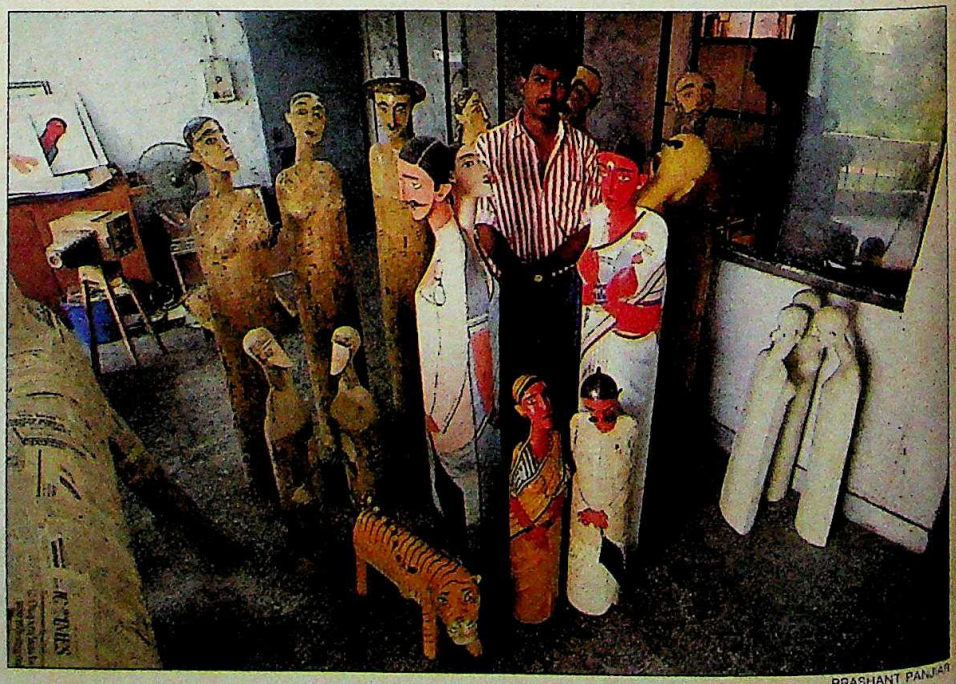
Then there is Arpita Singh, the self-effacing Delhi painter with a delightful sense of humour who worked laboriously and largely unsung for many years. During the last few years she has zoomed to the top of the pantheon of artists. Her name is spoken in hushed tones among the *cognoscenti*. Her works sell like hot-cakes during exhibitions, with queues waiting for the next batch. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has bought her painting—their second purchase of contemporary Indian art (Baroda painter, Ghulam Sheikh's huge canvas is the first). And she was one of the three painters included in the contemporary art exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art at the Centre Pompidou in Paris during the Festival of India.

Down at the unknown end of the scale is the 22-year-old sculptor Pushpamala from Bangalore. Some of her highly original terracotta sculptures which she did as a student in Baroda in 1985 created quite a stir during the successful group show of seven sculptors organised by Vivan Sundaram a couple of years ago. Pushpamala's works were included in the last triennal and are widely appreciated by artists and buyers.

There is also Jagdish, a 32-year-old painter from Hyderabad who has been working in the Garhi studio complex in Delhi for the last four years. His inventive and striking huge paper sculptures—they



PRASHANT PANJIAR



PRASHANT PANJIAR

Arpita Singh (right); and Jagdish with his paper sculptures: the new rage

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look like papier mache but are actually sculpted hard cardboard figures of men and women who seem to have emerged from the films of Shyam Benegal—sell as fast as he makes them. He is, as he says, a happy "freelancer" selling his paintings and paper sculptures all over the country. He feels that the older lot are now "stale and plagiarise the young".

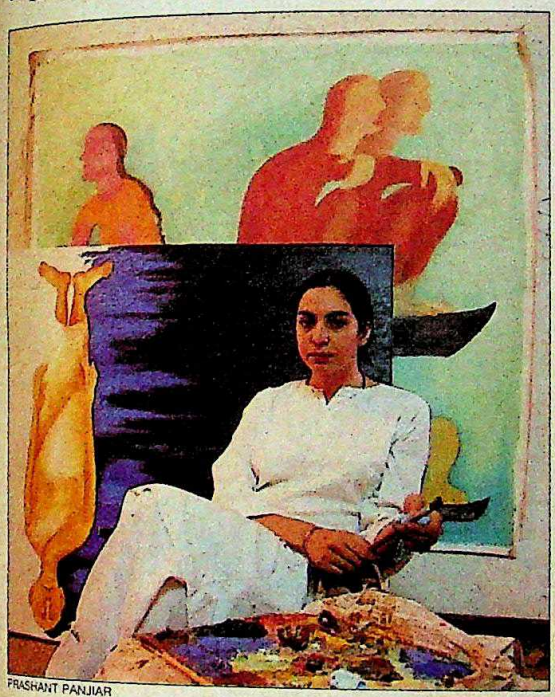
What is adding impetus to the new trend is the fact that art galleries are now cropping up in the metropolises the way fast food restaurants did in the '70s. Bombay has a new gallery in Bandra called Designscape and boutiques have started to sell paintings as well as handicrafts and designer clothes. A new commercial gallery, Arressa has in fact shrewdly put artists and designers together and come up with Art Wear. The fairly new promotional Sista Gallery in Bangalore run by the indefatigable Sara Abraham has attracted the best artists from all over India and held significant shows. Delhi has two new galleries and its hotels have taken on the role of art patrons. Calcutta's Chitrakut Gallery appears to have triggered a buying spree, albiet for the big names of art. Auctions for charity are *de rigueur*. They suit everybody: a good cause is served, the painter sells and the buyer gets a tax deduction for his philanthropic endeavours.

Moreover, artists themselves are increasingly renting commercial galleries to exhibit their works. The Triveni Gallery in Delhi for example is booked until next summer. Art students not even out of college, some not even out of school are holding exhibitions of their work. And many of them sell.

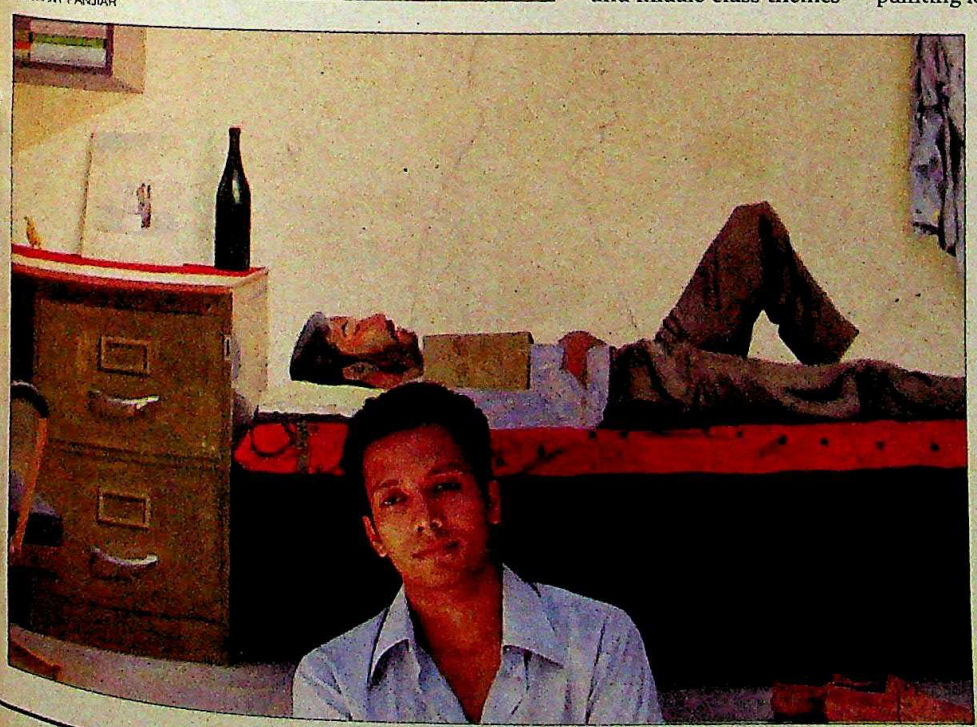
Once, not too long ago, life in the art world moved at an even, taken-for-granted pace. There was, of course, the evergreen prima donna in front: M.F. Hussain with his flowing Moses-like white beard and his fastest-on-the-draw paint brush. In his wake followed the Krishan Khannas, the Akbar Padamsees, the Razas, the Gaitondes, the Sabavalas and a host of eminent fellow-travellers with miles of canvas behind them. And way, way behind trailed the struggling young and unknown artists. The pulse of the art market then was steady. Prices of canvases rose gradually, Hussain giving the occasional jack up in his inimitable ways. The art market held no surprises.

But now the market has gone haywire—upwards. Galleries report an increase of 25 per cent in the price of their works in the last year. And benefiting the most from the sudden flood of money gushing into the art world are the lesser-known artists whose prices are beginning to leap-frog. At the mammoth CRY exhibition last month in Bombay, 130 of the 180 works sold within a day. In fact, some mediocre works of well-known artists did not sell as well as the unknown artists who had sent in their best. Says Jyoti Baswan of CRY, Bombay: "It was heartening to see people genuinely appreciate painting for what it is without the odious comparison with big names or western painters. People were not just buying safely. They were surprised to see so many new names and their works. They kept asking us: "Who are these artists? Why have we not heard of them before?" Some of these painters had never exhibited north of Hyderabad."

Why the mad rush? One answer: the art market now encompasses the upper middle and middle classes. Tiring of Czech crystal, endless reproductions of Cezanne's apples and second-rate imitation French period furniture—as one art watcher put it—Indians buying elite are looking at indigenous products. "It is now the in thing to buy paintings," explains Roshan Alkazi of Delhi's prestigious and pioneering Art



PRASHANT PANJIAR



Arpana Caur (left); and Atul Dodiya: urban *angst* and middle class themes

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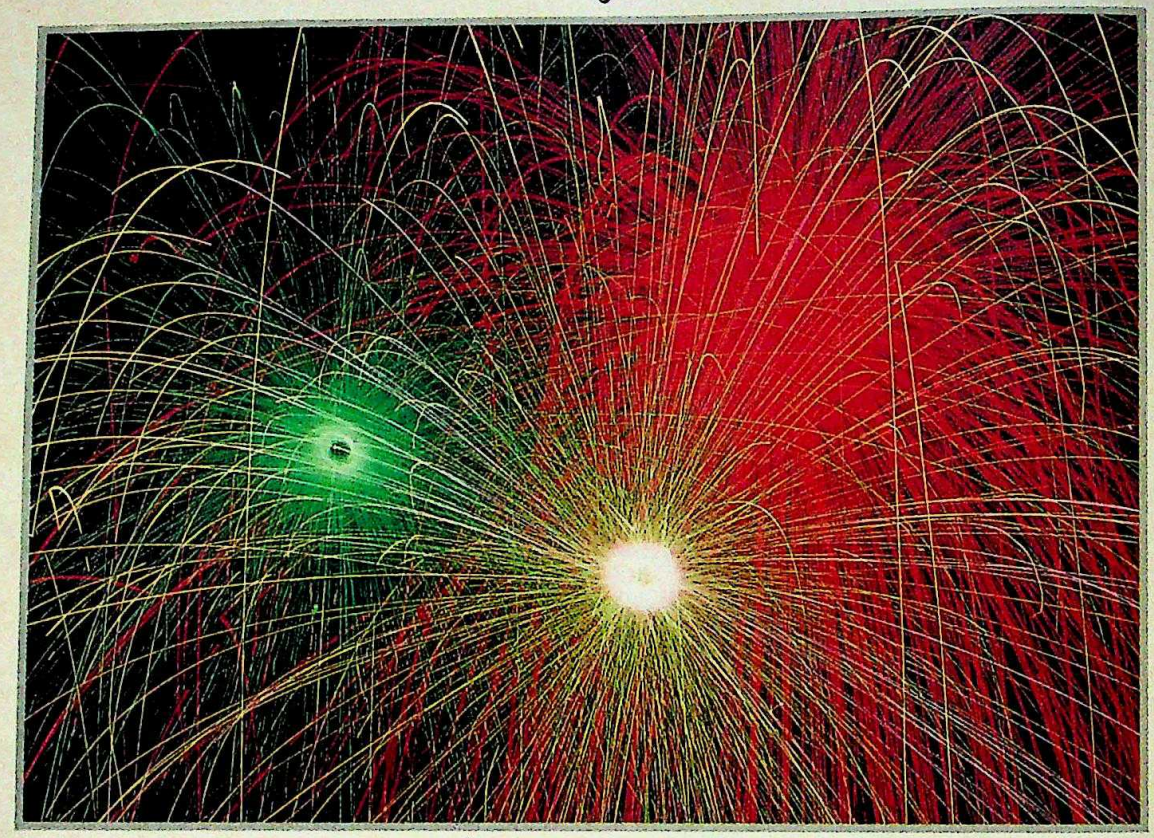
A Burst of Colors



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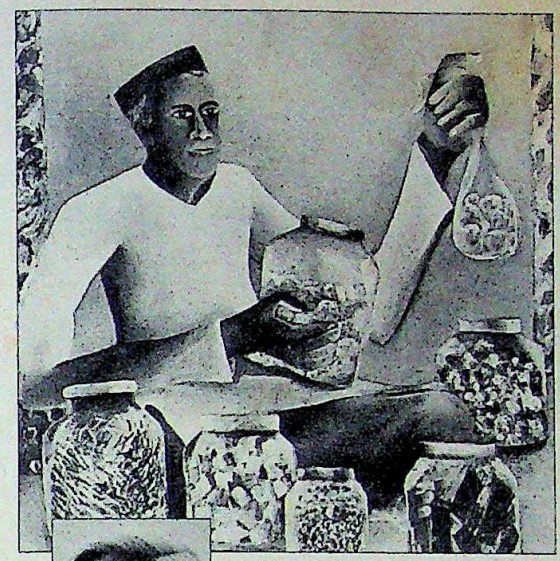

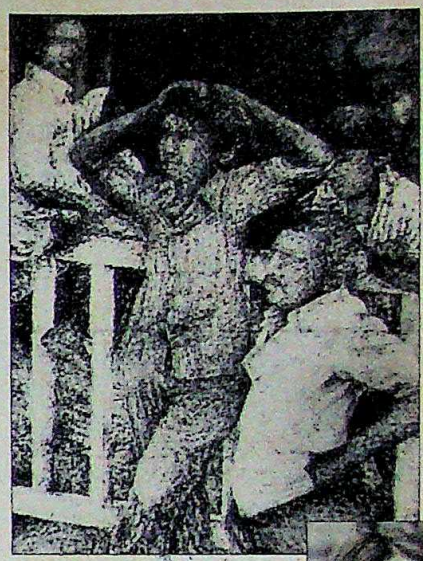

(Inset) Bhupen Khakar and Navjot (far right) with their paintings: growing recognition

Heritage. "Earlier 90 per cent of our buyers were foreign and 10 per cent Indian. Today I am glad to say it is the other way round. There are now a growing number of salaried people: teachers, ad executives, plain executives and journalists who buy works of art."

The rush towards the second generation painters is now taking place, according to renowned Baroda painter Bhupen Khakar, because "they are cheaper and the buyers know that in five years time they will replace the others." The risk element eggs the buyers on towards uncharted territories. Says Dadiba Pundole of Bombay's well-known Pundole Art Gallery: "People used to walk into the gallery and walk out. Now they stop and ask who the artist is. Those who can't afford the big names are now getting interested in graphics and water-colours and in some of the lesser known artists."

The real engine of change in the art world, however, is the increased awareness of art. Magazines and colour supplements of newspapers, along with the various charity auctions have added glamour to the world of art. "People now invite artists as conversation pieces, as they do with actors," says the irrepressible Khakar.

Show business, especially cinema and television, are good barometers of what is happening in society. These days, explains Ravi Jain of Delhi's Dhoomi Mal Gallery, there is hardly a TV serial without a painting on the wall and "increasingly these paintings are by contemporary artists". Khakar, in fact, is often being told by people that they saw his work in a film.

The building boom is also responsible for contemporary art becoming an Eldorado for investments. The rich go in for the names; the not-so-rich for the unknown painter whose work will grace their walls—and also appreciate in value and give them the hefty step up the social ladder. A rich Bombay socialite is now getting three of India's heavyweight painters: Bhupen Khakar, Vivan Sunderam and Nalini Malini to do a glass mural in her house, followed by creative input from Paramjit and Arpita Singh. At the other end young couples moving into new small apartments are stalking galleries to buy works to bring their own walls alive.

Architects, for example, have become frequent gallery-goers in search of paintings for their clients. Pundole Gallery recently sold half-a-dozen oils to a *nouveau riche* industrialist who had come in with his team of advisers and his architect. He had just moved to Bombay from Surat and wanted his office to fit in with the Bombay scene.

Yet another important reason why unsung painters are attracting buyers is the contemporary content of their work. The works of some of these artists appear to be more relevant to the present. This generation has yoked off the colonial legacy and with it the dilemma of their predecessors who turned to the West for inspiration and guidance. Their works exude a sense of confidence and bravado.

Says Navjot: "There is a definite movement in India to try to go back to the roots, to paint what they actually experience and not to paint like the contemporary western painters. We are influenced by our own surroundings and what we observe."

The portrait of the new artist is then one of a brash confidence missing earlier. Explains an emphatic Pushpamala: "We do not have any hassles of taking from anywhere. There is no longer any need to be either indigenous or western; those issues are irrelevant. The whole body of Indian art, film, dance, drama—all this bounces off one another. That is our source."

For Pushpamala as well as many of the other successful painters today, the new artists are the children of the Indian artists who have gone before them. Consciously turning their backs on the western styles and gurus they examine the four decades of post-Independence art. "The Ara image is what I feed off. Not German expressionism," says Sudhir Patwardhan, the painter-doctor whose canvases of urban Indian landscapes—such as his crowded trains and dislocated *citywallahs* have been critically and commercially popular.

Many of the new painters like Atul Dodiya, 29, who is being talked of as a new find and on the Khakar trail, paint the "common people". Says Dodiya of his work: "I am interested in simple people and their day-to-day life. I live in this middle class suburb, Ghatkopar outside Bombay. My neighbours come and see and enjoy what I paint. They can recognise the objects and surroundings."

Not too long ago the stylised B. Prabhas with the village idylls and sanitised rural India dominated the mass market. Today, it is a long way from here to the urban *angst* of a Navjot or Arpana Caur whose series on oil inspired by the Delhi riots of 1984 and the widows of Brindaban—"difficult paintings to live with," as she says—now find a growing market.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay and Delhi

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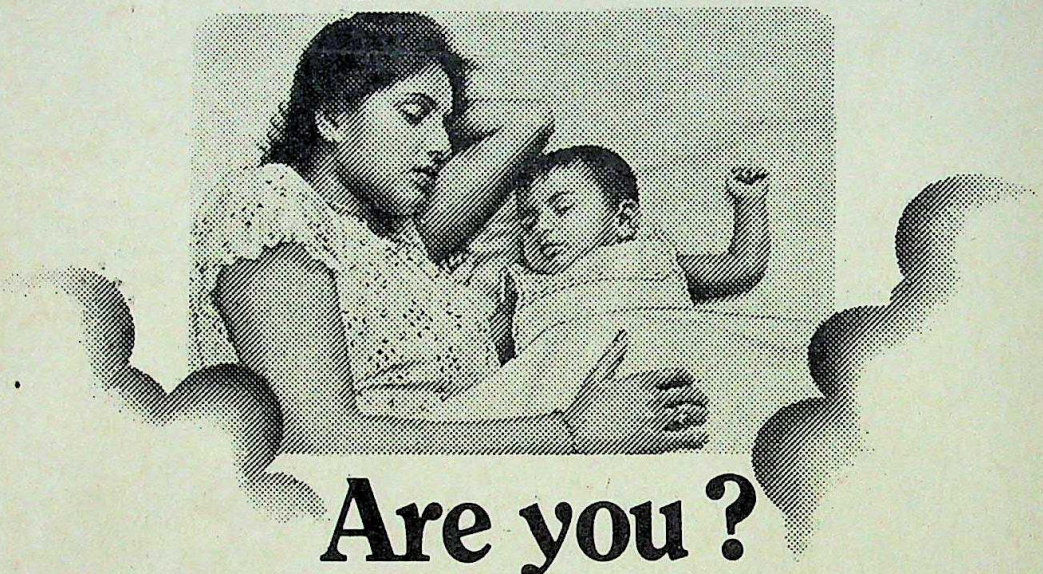

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BOMBAY

A Picture of Success

Two sponsoring galleries boost the art movement

IF M.F. Husain is a household name today, and a painting by S.H. Raza can fetch nearly Rs 1 lakh, it is in no small measure thanks to the painstaking promotion of contemporary Indian art by two sponsoring galleries in Bombay—Gallery Chemould and Pundole Art Gallery. Both have recently completed a quarter century in the business.

"Whichever way you look at it, a sea-change has taken place over the years," says Chemould's founder, Kekoo Gandhy. "Indian art no longer means just Rajasthani miniatures, and it has become a significant investment." Adds Kali Pundole: "Last year's art auction by Christie's has given a further fillip to contemporary Indian art—now more people take it seriously."

Gandhy had set up the Chemical Moulding Manufacturing Company, later shortened to Chemould, in 1940 in the then distant suburb of Andheri. He was drawn towards art by the demand for picture frames from a British prisoner of war camp near his factory.

By 1946, Gandhy had become the secretary of the Bombay Art Society, whose annual exhibition were major cultural events. Later he opened the Chemould frame shop in south Bombay which soon became a virtual art gallery and held Husain's first one-man show in the early '50s.

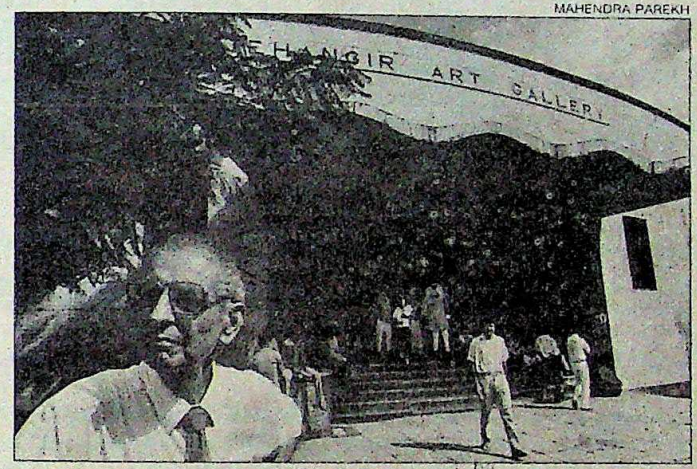
Though Gandhy set up the first Gallery Chemould in Calcutta in 1951 (it has been dormant for more than 10 years now), he and wife Khorshed opened the more famous Bombay Gallery on the first floor of the Jehangir Art Gallery only in September 1963. Just four months before that, Pundole, who also had a frame shop at Flora Fountain, opened his own gallery with a group show.

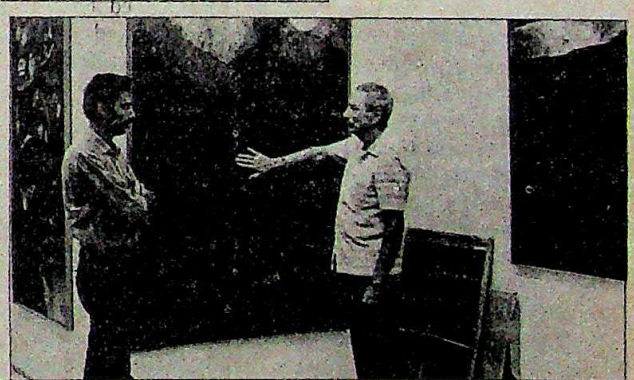
Gandhy opened a branch of the Chemould in New Delhi in 1965 (it closed in 1978), and the gallery really seemed to have arrived with the first retrospective of Husain in Bombay in 1969. The massive show, with Husain's painted Fiat car as the centrepiece, launched the barefoot, bearded artist on the road to becoming India's first celebrity painter.

But besides promoting the established painters, Chemould also encouraged younger talent. Recalls painter Laxman Shrestha: "When I first came to Bombay in the early '60s, the artist's only access to buyers was through a gallery. Kekoo's contribution in encouraging young painters and promoting contemporary art is tremendous." Even painters who are now big names were supported crucially by Chemould and Pundole. "By ensuring a fixed income for me in the early years without pressuring me, Chemould helped me to remain independent and work my own way," observes Tyeb Mehta.

Nevertheless, the audience for contemporary art in India, and especially the buyer, remains as fickle as ever, underlining the continued importance of sponsoring galleries like Chemould and Pundole. Last month Pundole organised the first one-man show of a new talent, Andhra Pradesh painter V. Ramesh, who was in such dire straits that he had to destroy a superb 18 ft by 6 ft painting for lack of storage space. Ramesh teaches art in Vishakhapatnam, lives in a tiny room and paints large figurative canvases capturing life in a small town. He was discovered by Kali Pundole's son Dadi in a group show in Bhopal and persuaded to bring his paintings to Bombay. Convinced of the intrinsic value of his work, Pundole sent back the dejected painter, on the verge of discarding his brushes, with a Rs 20,000 advance and set about convincing collectors that Ramesh's work would be an excellent investment. When the show ended, five of the eight large canvases were sold, the first sales by Ramesh.

MAHENDRA PAREKH





Gandhy at Jehangir gallery (left); Kali Pundole with son in their gallery

Besides promoting young talent, Chemould and Pundole art galleries are introducing Indian art on the international circuit.

In the last 25 years, Pundole and Gandhy have witnessed the extraordinary transformation in the market for art. In a more competitive environment, younger artists display a higher degree of talent, buyers pay more attention to the work they acquire, and there is a much wider interest in contemporary art. Gandhy feels that in the next phase contemporary Indian art will gradually establish itself at the international level. If that happens, it will be because of the modest beginnings made by promoters like Pundole and Gandhy.—M. RAHMAN

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BURMA

Girding for the Battle

Students arm for fight ahead

WHEN the morning mist has cleared over the rugged mountain ranges of eastern Burma, close to the Thai border, crackling loudspeakers summon the inhabitants of the Thi Baw Bo jungle camp to a communal breakfast. Hundreds of earnest-looking youngmen, and a few women, take their seats at long bamboo-tables to get their daily ration of rice, dal and *nga-pi*, a Burmese fermented fish paste.

Dressed in city clothes and some wearing spectacles, these young people stand out conspicuously among the Karens and the other hill tribesmen who normally move about in the almost inaccessible, jungle-covered Thai-Burmese border mountains. They are students who have fled the brutal military suppression in the towns of the Burmese lowland. The crackdown followed General Saw Maung's bloody takeover of the Government in Rangoon on September 18 in which over 400 students were gunned down by army-manned machine-gun nests, located on the roofs of buildings.

Over the last fortnight, an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 students and other pro-democracy activists have quickly taken refuge in the remote mountains. The terrain has for long been the operating grounds for some of Burma's numerous ethnic insurgent armies: the Karen National Liberation Army, the Karenni Army, the Mon National Liberation Army and, in the far north of the country, the Kachin Independence Army. For years, the ethnic insurgents have been fighting very hard for autonomy within a Burmese federation. But until now, they have failed to link up their struggle with the virulent anti-government agitation in the Burmese-dominated central plains.

"The mass demonstrations in the towns are over now. There's really no point in getting shot by the Government's army, and we realise that the military elite that runs our country will not give up voluntarily. That is why we are preparing for armed struggle against the junta in Rangoon," says Hla Aung, a 29-year-old post-graduate student of philosophy from the Rangoon Arts and Science University. He now is the general secretary of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front which counts among its members all the 1,800 students at the Thi Baw Bo camp. The front has also maintained contacts with other similar student camps which have sprung up all along the border.

About a hundred of the front's members are young women. One of them is Mee Mee, 19, also from the Rangoon university. "We have to fight," she says. "The junta promises democracy and holding of general elections even as it shoots down hundreds of students and arrests our comrades at Rangoon. We have to arm ourselves and fight back. I'm not afraid to die."

Interestingly, none of the students at Thi Baw Bo see any contradiction between their decision to take up arms and the overground opposition leaders' determination to stay and wage a legal struggle in Rangoon. They see their action as supportive of the movement led by former prime minister U Nu, ex-Brigadier-General Aung Gyi, ex-General Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi, the famous daughter of independence hero Aung San. All of them have joined forces under the umbrella of the National United Front for Democracy. The front's formation was announced on September 24. "It is all part of the same struggle for democracy. It's just the means that differ," says one of the students, adding: "The ethnic rebels are our brothers, too."

Even if the students seem unanimous in their desire to join hands with the ethnic insurgents, it is evident that their style of armed struggle against Saw Maung's military government in Rangoon is going to be of an entirely different nature. Says Hla Aung: "We don't want to form just another rebel army of jungle fighters. Our intention is to learn how to conduct urban guerrilla warfare; to strike at specific targets in the towns such as military installations, petrol depots and, especially, hated army officers who are responsible for ordering the killings of unarmed demonstrators in August and September."

The students at Thi Baw Bo assert that

We don't want to be just jungle fighters. We intend to learn how to conduct urban guerrilla warfare.

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BERTIL LINTNER

The students at the Thi Baw Bo camp maintain that though they've left the urban areas for the jungles their network of underground contacts in town is intact.

although they have left the urban areas for the jungles, their network of underground contacts in the towns is still largely intact. They also claim to possess Sten guns, .303 Enfield rifles and a few automatic weapons captured from police stations in Rangoon in the aftermath of the coup last month. These, as well as Chinese-made M-36 hand grenades—which can be bought in the black market in Rangoon for as little as 35 Kyats (about Rs 70)—are now being hidden in "safe places" in the capital and elsewhere.

If this claim indeed is true, Burma could soon be facing a Punjab-type situation with squads of well-trained and highly dedicated commandos creating havoc and disturbances which the military may be unable to control.

Sceptics, however, point out that although the students certainly do not lack dedication—nor the popular support needed to successfully wage urban guerrilla warfare—they still have to face a battle-hardened Burmese Army. Said one analyst: "Rangoon's well-disciplined troops have been fighting the ethnic insurgents almost incessantly since independence from Britain in 1948. In the towns, it has already shown that it is prepared to open fire even on peaceful demonstrators. It is not going to be a walk-over, even if the Opposition enjoys popular support."

Other sources emphasise that the insurgents who now host the students themselves face shortages of arms and ammunition. Even their training facilities are said to be limited. And no outside power has so far shown an interest in giving anything but humanitarian aid to the students along the border. "Burma's main donor countries, the US, Japan and West Germany, have suspended their aid until the situation in the country improves to show their disapproval of the present regime. But supplying the resistance with arms and ammunition is an entirely different matter," says one political observer in Bangkok.

Two Muslim rebel groups—the Muslim Liberation Organisation of Burma led by Mustafa Kamal alias Kyaw Hla and the Kawthoolei Muslim Liberation Front headed by Dr Abdul Razak—have appealed for assistance and military aid from the Islamic world on the grounds that over 500 of the students are Muslims of subcontinental origin. But it still remains to be seen how the outside world is going to respond to these pleas.

Most analysts in South-East Asia seem to agree that a fundamental change in Burma has to come from within the military itself, the country's most powerful institution by far. But till now, it has remained astonishingly cohesive with almost no obvious split in its ranks. That, however, may change in the light of last fortnight's developments. Said one student at Thi Baw Bo: "Earlier, the army had to fight only the ethnic insurgents along the borders. But we are Burmese and many of us have relatives in the armed forces. A situation is soon bound to occur where a field commander is forced to face his own son, nephew, or any another relative. Therefore, we do not think that the present loyalty to the top military leadership can last forever."

But an erosion in the army's ranks does not appear to be an imminent possibility. So the students are up against impossible odds. The vast majority of those at the Thi Baw Bo camp suffer from malaria, dysentery and other diseases which they contracted during their long and hazardous trek from the central plains to the guerrilla-controlled frontier areas. The armed Burmese struggle against Rangoon seems to be very much in its infancy still.

—BERTIL LINTNER in Thi Baw Bo, eastern Burma

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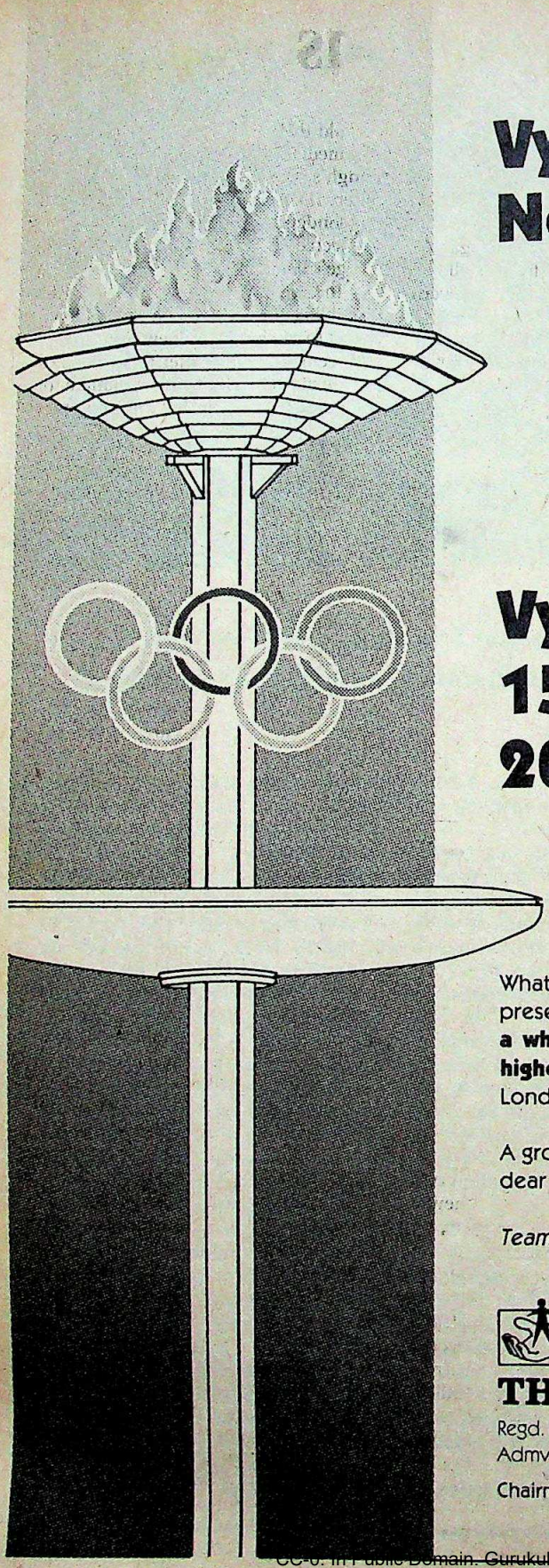

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Hasty Conclusions

NO one emerges from the controversy surrounding the Syed Modi murder case with honour. The stellar cast includes the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probing the case, the Jan Morcha leaders who decided to make a political issue of the involvement of their Uttar Pradesh colleague Sanjay Singh, and the press, which fell flat on its face.

The case has all the ingredients of a gripping story. There's the unexplained murder of India's ace badminton player, Syed Modi. There's his widow Ameeta, also a badminton player of merit. And there's her friend, the colourful Sanjay Singh, who was baptised in the Sanjay Gandhi school. He had transferred his allegiance from Rajiv Gandhi's Congress to the Jan Morcha and was helping V.P. Singh in the Allahabad by-election. What is more, he is the "raja" of Amethi, Rajiv's constituency.

The CBI made the initial grievous mistake of leaking Ameeta's diary to a few correspondents, seeking to link her to Sanjay Singh in an obvious attempt to provide a motive for the crime. The two news agencies, the Press Trust of India and the United News of India, were ready takers of the story, with Doordarshan expectedly coming up to help later. More piquantly, two national newspapers, *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times*, also fell in line.

The CBI's move merely gave a handle to Sanjay Singh and his colleagues to politicise the issue. One saw such august personages as Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammed Khan flank Sanjay Singh as he made wild charges of conspiracy against the prime minister and the government establishment, duly reported in the press. Sanjay Singh, for the Jan Morcha leaders, emerged as something of a hero.

Leaving aside the propaganda about value-based politics the Jan Morcha indulges in, the actions of its leaders—except V.P. Singh—underlined the disregard of all norms by political parties. As the Opposition's hopes of gaining power are surging, it is a free-for-all. Any stick is good enough to beat the Government with. The Government too has not enhanced its reputation by its conduct.

All the more reason then that the press should be above the fray, which is getting dirtier by the day. The two news agencies routinely allow themselves to be used as unofficial spokesmen of the Government. But what about newspapers? How can they publish reports not attributed to specific CBI officers, implicating persons in a murder case?

To the credit of both *The Times of India* and *The Hindustan Times*, they sought to make amends by editorially decrying "trial by media". *The Times of India* raised the point of the media's credibility. It said: "The CBI's leaks were unattributable to specific CBI officers and should the affected persons seek legal redressal, the CBI could well disclaim all responsibility. Would this not erode the credibility of the media?" But in the report on Sanjay Singh's release on bail nearly a month later, *The Times of India*'s Lucknow correspondent did not heed the advice. He projected the defence contention as the judge's finding.

Indeed, the case raises a host of troubling questions for the press. In our effort to catch up with new technology, we seem to have forgotten the basic rules of journalism. The political climate, of course, does not help, but the press owes itself the obligation of levelling with its readers.

It is the Government's effort to use the press to sow confusion among opposition ranks, at the very least, use it to fly trial balloons. If the press lends itself to such efforts, often unavoidable, it is standard newspaper practice to source reports. Once they are sourced, the trial balloons are pricked.

It also behoves the press not to destroy institutions like the CBI, the premier investigating agency in the country. It must be criticised when such criticism is deserved, as it certainly was for its blunder in making the original leak. *The Hindustan Times* was justifiably harsh: "This (the fact that Sanjay Singh was not arrested even five days after his Delhi press conference) only gives credence to the opposition charge that the bureau has become a 'willing tool' in the hands of the Government to settle scores with a prominent political adversary." But to cover its own embarrassment, the press should not make the CBI the fall guy, as *The Statesman* did on August 23.

But the CBI seems to have a talent for putting its foot in its mouth. It decided to take on the *Indian Express* for its reporting of the murder case. The predictable result was a rebuff. The courts will determine the innocence or guilt of Sanjay Singh and Ameeta Modi. The verdict has already been delivered on the press. Guilty.

Syed and Ameeta Modi

S. PREMI

While the CBI has a talent for putting its foot in its mouth, the press too has fallen flat on its face while reporting on the Syed Modi case.

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XXIV OLYMPIAD

The Power and the Glory

After the event, the ultimate triumph is South Korea's

THEY call it Kanggangsuwollae. Every fall, Koreans break into ritual dancing to welcome the night of August Moon, or the harvest festival of Chu'sok. The leader sings in solo verse and the circle of dancers around him repeats the refrain. Gradually the beat picks up. The feet move faster and so does the rhythm of music, building up a climactic crescendo.

Last fortnight, as the year's most important festival visited Korea again, another larger and noisier Kanggangsuwollae built up to its climax in the ancient nation's capital. At the 27 venues spread along the Han river, Chamshil, and the distant port city of Pusan, the flower of mankind's youth was blossoming as it had not been allowed to for more than a decade and a half by international political intrigue.

The Olympics produced its winners and losers, stars and scandals, glory and shame. But one people who firmly believe that ultimately the glory is theirs alone are the four-crore proud Koreans. The Olympics, for them, was the greatest event since the cease-fire in the fratricidal war in the '50s. It was so special that more than 20,000 students volunteered to work inhuman hours with the organisers for no pay at all. Even bent, arthritic, octogenarian women in the subways left their seats, insisting that foreigners, the members of the "Olympic family", sit instead.

Koreans had defied fears of international boycott, terrorist threats and domestic political unrest to stage the show. Now they were basking in its sunshine and teaching the world, through the Olympics, their ancient philosophy of yin and yang, which was also the theme underlying the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies. The Koreans believe that all confrontation ultimately becomes harmony. So dry and wet, man and woman, yin and yang will all be harmonised into one.

For the Koreans, unfortunately, their age-old philosophy is put to its most difficult test when yin and yang come to symbolise the northern and southern parts of their own country. Many in Seoul had hoped that the Games will open a new window between the segments of the divided nation. That is not going to happen immediately. But the Games did give

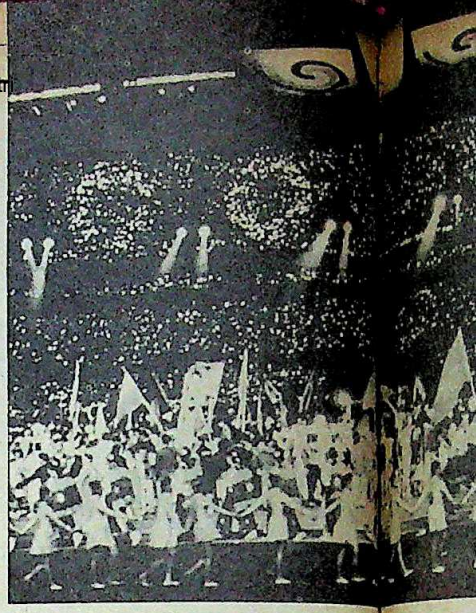
■ Flags of countries being sold

the Koreans a new kind of self-respect and pride and spark a strong spirit of nationalistic revival. It is not surprising then that as the Koreans piled up their largest medal tally ever, 9 of their 12 gold medals came in combat sports where the spirit of the contender in the ring is all that matters. In the process, they also dwarfed the better-known Asian sporting powers such a Japan and China and put in shade eve West Germany.

The wild cheering at the opening an closing ceremonies, hundreds of tea stained Korean cheeks in the stands an the extremely orderly behaviour of th crowds and officials pointed to only on thing. The Koreans were using th XXIVth Olympiad to signal their arriva on the world stage as an industrial an economic power. The air was thick wit the emotion of nationalistic revivalism and it was not uncommon for Koreans t ask visitors: "Did you go to Tokyo in 196 Isn't our organisation better?"

For the citizens of the divided natio that was battered first under Japanes occupation for 35 years earlier in th century and then decimated in the cours

■ View of the press village at Seoul



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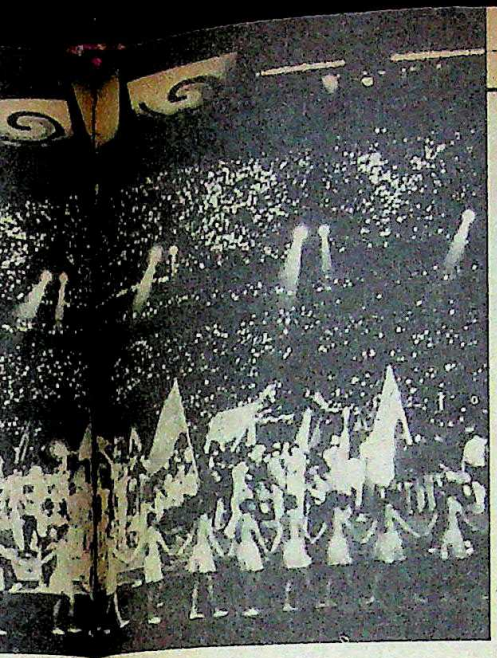

■ The grand finale to the Games

of the long international war in the '50s, the Olympics was a way of telling the world that they have recovered and grown to be worthy challengers to their former colonial tormentors. For the Korean partisan, nothing was sweeter than a victory against the Japanese. Better still if it was in judo.

THE Korean craze for winning was matched only by their obsession for security. There were metal detectors at all venues, athletes' and the media villages and even at the entrances of all hotels. All cars approaching the venues and hotels were checked and the perimeters patrolled by guards led by fearsome Alsatians. The most heavily guarded area, obviously, was the athletes' village where electronic and optical devices watched all approaches while commandos trained to kill without using weapons moved around with their hounds.

As in India, there was good justification for the tight security which was organised by none other than the famous Indian policeman Ashwani Kumar who, after his retirement from service, has been one of the more active members of the International Olympic Committee. But the security was also overdone, just as in India. Before the Games began, the entire world had seen pictures of hooded commandos under training and that is said to be the main factor that deterred many foreign tourists from coming. A fortnight before the Games, it was impossible to get a hotel room of any kind in Seoul. Later though, many hotels were offering discounts as tourists who had made bookings failed to show up. The only part of Seoul where foreign visitors were visible was the pleasure-bargain shopping strip of Itae'won. But a close look showed that most of the shoppers and pleasure-seekers were participants, officials or mediamen, all wearing their credentials round their necks. The businessmen say that if the immediate gains are not great, there is nothing they can do about it. They hope the publicity Korean goods got will make the Games a profitable investment in the long run.

In any case, they took no chances. Big business houses like Hyundai, Daewoo, Samsung and Goldstar which have made the Korean economic miracle possible used the Olympiad as a golden opportunity to perpetuate it. "Come to think of it, suddenly the Korean manufacturers have a window to the world. You will soon find yet another export boom," said the commercial attache in a western embassy in Seoul. True enough, for practically everything in evidence in and around the Olympic stadia, buses, cars, hoardings and the local mass media carried only one message: buy Korean products.

Almost everything in the athletes' and press villages—the Seoul Olympics Organising Committee (SLOOC)—charged up to $65 (about Rs 942) a day for a room—was paid for by sponsors. The TV sets were installed by Goldstar and the refrigerators by Samsung. Even shopping bags and complimentary bottles of cologne had bold company logos and the "official supplier to the XXIVth Olympiad" legend stamped on them. The major companies, including the famous Jindo Furs, KIA motors and Pacific Chemicals, offered free factory junkets to visiting athletes and journalists through brochures that unabashedly promised "free gifts, lunch and drinks".

In such a highly commercialised atmosphere there was obviously a surfeit of freebies for anyone hanging the "dog-tag" (official SLOOC credentials) round his neck. Four major sports goods manufacturers set up service centres close to the athletes' village where all sportsmen could brandish their cards and get anything for free: from track suits to spikes, from chronometers to fingure pressure massage. Officials and journalists, though, had to be content with tote bags, caps, pens, T-shirts and keychains.

So firmly had the freebie game been institutionalised that, with a surfeit of foreigners cadging free meals, the best way to attract visitors to anything, from a shoe-shop to a church, was to dangle blandishments. Adidas, Nike, Asics and Korean sports goods makers Le Caf ran clubs where "distinguished" visitors could go and "hold discussions in a relaxed manner over drinks and light refreshments". All were full up by seven in the evening. Freebooting peaked in the last week of the Olympics as the Church of Imanuelle, midway between the Olympic park and the sports complex, hung a huge banner at its entrance saying: "Join us to hear the holy message. We serve dinner."

■ An exhibition of sports goods

The competition, obviously, was to get attention. Kodak, for example, bought the main sponsorship of the Games—"for several million dollars" to quote a company official—and set up a centre where accredited photographers were given free film, processing facilities and even flak jackets. Kodak dished out 1,10,000 free rolls of film, processed 38 lakh colour frames and printed at least 60,000 free black and white prints during the Games.

Similarly, Nikon had the official camera supplier status and gave out bags to photographers. But not to be outdone,

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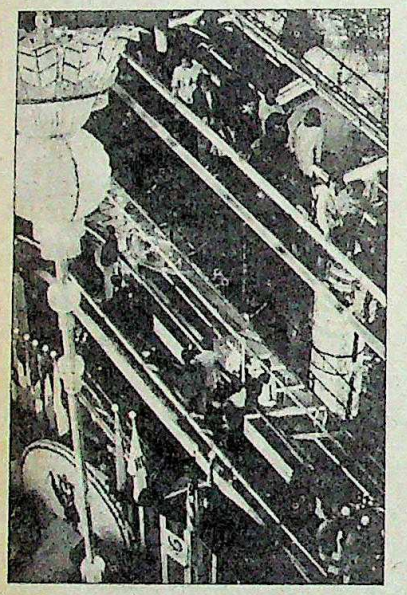
both Fuji and Cannon, the main rivals of Kodak and Nikon, set up centres overlooking the main press centre offering similar goodies.

The International Sports Journalists' Association held a grand reception for the world press at Seoul's seven-star Hotel Lotte International and offered gifts (by the companies sponsoring the dinner) to the first 1,000 journalists that reached the hotel. The number touched more than 2,000 by 7 p.m. for the 8 p.m. dinner and there was a stampede for the gift-bags containing two wine bottles and a T-shirt. "It is like feeding the sharks. But I did fine," exclaimed a New



■ Departmental store at Hotel Lotte

Zealand radio commentator triumphantly waving the bag he had salvaged from the melee.

Perhaps the only time the journalists, officials and sportsmen showed more discretion in picking freebies was in the course of their quiet visits to the first-aid centres in the Olympic village. In front of the receptionist lay open trays containing condoms and a sign saying: "Please take them if you need them." "No one ever asked us, but the cartons disappeared as soon as you put them there, " said chief medical officer at the press village Ji So-Ryu who spent much of his time treating around 60 patients a day complaining of "insomnia and overwork".

With the Koreans showing such thoroughness, there was little that the foreign media flocking Seoul could complain about. This Olympiad was by far the biggest media event in history so far.

The 15,000 mediamen substantially outnumbered the 13,000 competitors and the Koreans did all they could to make it snag-free. But there were problems even the doughty Koreans could do little about.

DESPITE years of training, not too many in Seoul can speak English. For three months, the Seoul taxi-drivers had been taking spoken English lessons for an hour a day without much use. Finally, the organisers began distributing printed cards for various destinations that the visitors could show the drivers. This despite the fact that the Government had spread its net all over the western universities to bring back for the Games students of Korean origin who speak English. Dozens of Korean graduate students from American universities wrote reams of press releases and memos every day. But when they issued one about traditional Korean food for the Chu'sok ceremony, they wrote at length about the beneficial effects of Korean "fomented" food.

If the Games provided the Korean nation a new *raison d'etre* and a window to the world, they also rewrote a few political equations. There was, to begin with, the most incongruous sight of Korean children waving Soviet flags and the rivalry in the boxing ring did land a jarring blow on the 35-year-old Korean-US friendship. The Koreans, in general, talked appreciatively of the East Bloc advances and, as if to underline the fact that sport is after all an extension of politics, a Hungarian trade office was opened in Seoul during the Olympics. Few Korean tears were shed for the Americans' poor performance but it was surprising how many rued poor showing by Asians, particularly people from "Indo" as the Koreans call India.

The Koreans have special affection

■ Gold-winning Indian paintings

for India. It is only partly because of the role played by the Indian soldiers under General Thimayya as part of the UN peace-keeping forces in the '50s. The Koreans remember too the early Indian aid for their remarkable reconstruction programme. But what they remember most of all is the way Rabindra Nath Tagore inspired their fight for freedom against the Japanese through verses he composed especially for Korea.

So it was not surprising when a Korean student guided INDIA TODAY to what was truly an Indian hall of fame. "You've won so many gold medals and you don't even know about it?" she asked. The medals had come off-the-field and yet were no less pleasing. In a huge gallery close to the majestic Korea World Trade Centre were displayed hundreds of paintings from children all over the world as part of the Olympic Arts Festival. The medal tally was a shocker: Indian children had bagged 10 of the 21 golds awarded to non-Korean children, making for the only authentic Indian victory in the XXIV Olympiad.

It was also not surprising that a large number of the winning entries came from Bengal, the part of India that the Koreans know best thanks, again, to Tagore. His lines are often used as opening invocations by Korean editorial writers. And the ones quoted most often, obviously, are those that became an inseparable part of the Korean freedom struggle. On a visit to Japan in 1928, Tagore had written: "In the golden age of Asia, Korea was its lamp-bearer. The lamp awaits to be lighted for the illumination of the East." Today the enlightened Korean repeatedly reads Tagore to a visitor and points, proudly, at the Olympic flame.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Seoul

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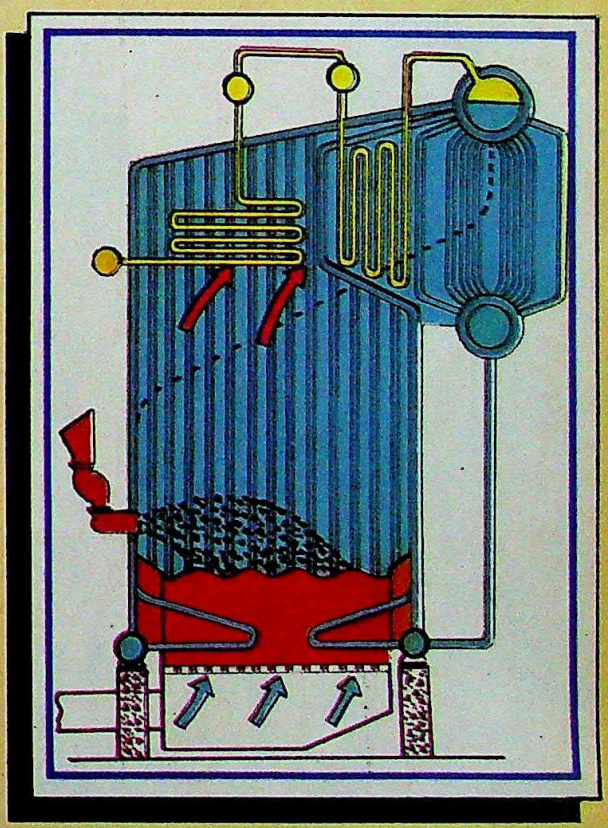

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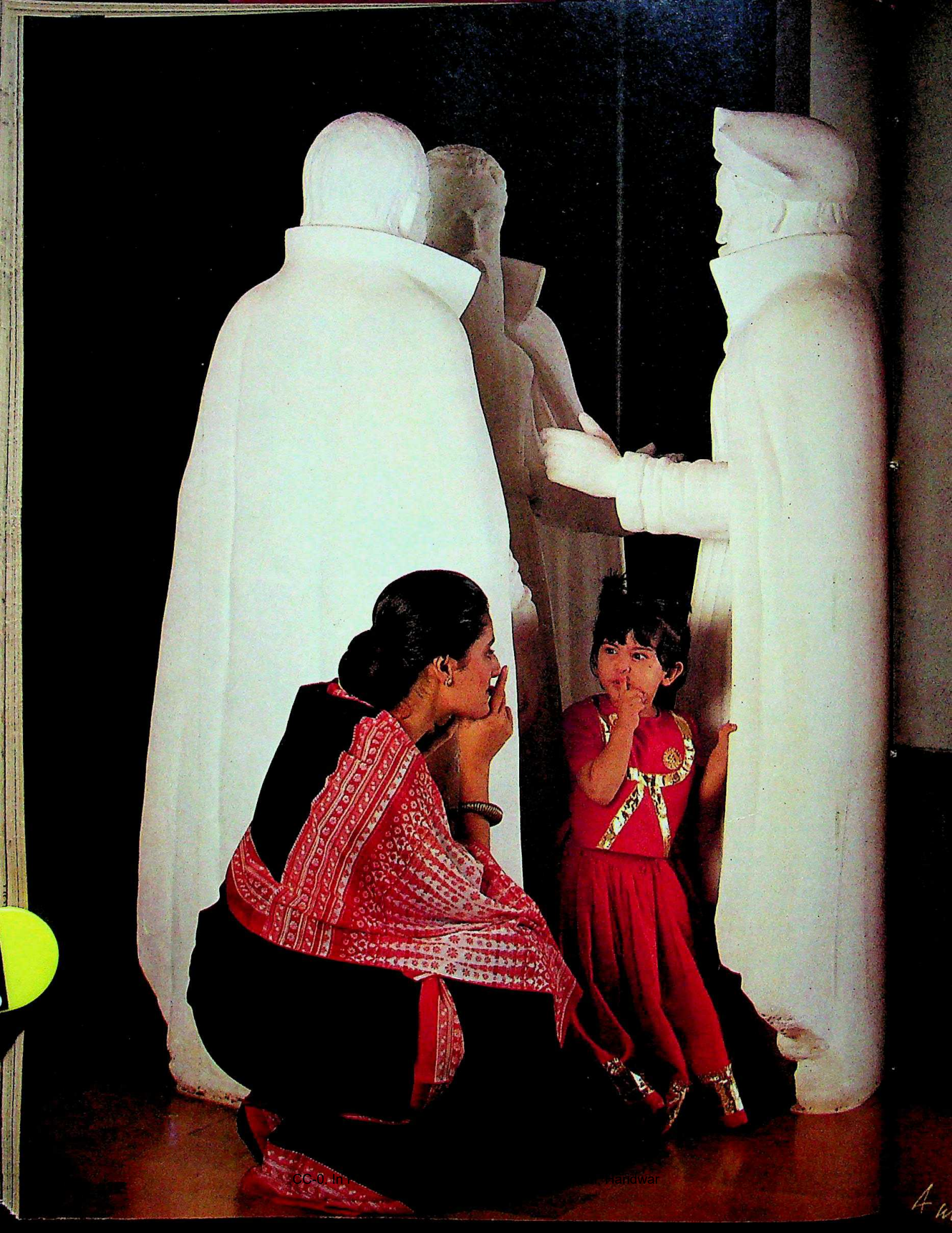

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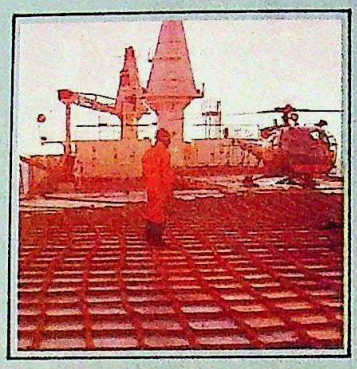

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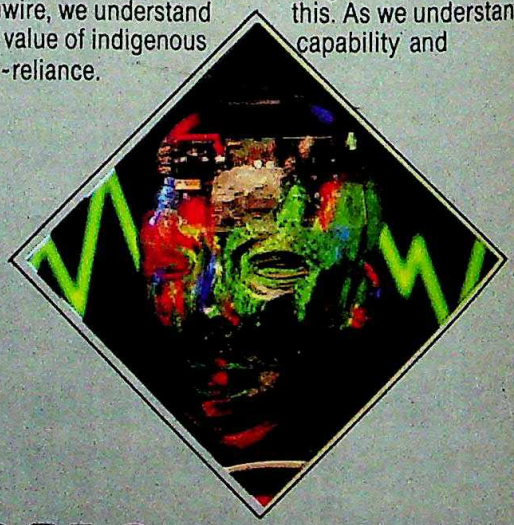

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Protecting the *Bicharas*

WHETHER it is Olympics or industry, India has failed to respond to an increasingly competitive world. Little Guyanas and Surinams show up the ineptitude and indecisiveness of our policies, while tiny Taiwans and Hong Kongs far outstrip our exports, despite our vastly greater resources and potential.

The three enemies of India's progress are epitomised by the words *parwa nahin* (it doesn't matter), *bichara* (poor chap) and *ji huzoor* (yes master). The deeply entrenched hold of these sentiments on our way of thinking makes us remarkably tolerant of inefficiency and imperfection. Today's world has no room for losers.

A zero-error system, vital for achievement, is almost unthinkable in India's present ethos. Rejection of defective materials, workmanship or time-schedules are compromised and we muddle along consoling ourselves with words like *chalega* (it will do), *thik hai* (it's okay) or *dekhenge* (we will see). Thus, *parwa-nahin* continues to rule our thinking already conditioned to accept incompetence and inefficiency, and we miss that hairline margin between victory and defeat. Construction is never perfectly aligned, deadlines are never dependable. Our products simply lack that "touch of class", so vital for global markets.

Inflexible standards are anathema to a society conditioned to compromise. People aren't accustomed to strict accountability with attendant rejections and punishments. Compromises and concessions are demanded in the name of the poor small-scale industries, the sacred public sector or in the name of socialist or Gandhian principles. Thus, employees may be rude, indisciplined, corrupt and incompetent, but they can rarely be reprimanded, let alone punished. The poor *bicharas* must be protected against any disciplinary action.

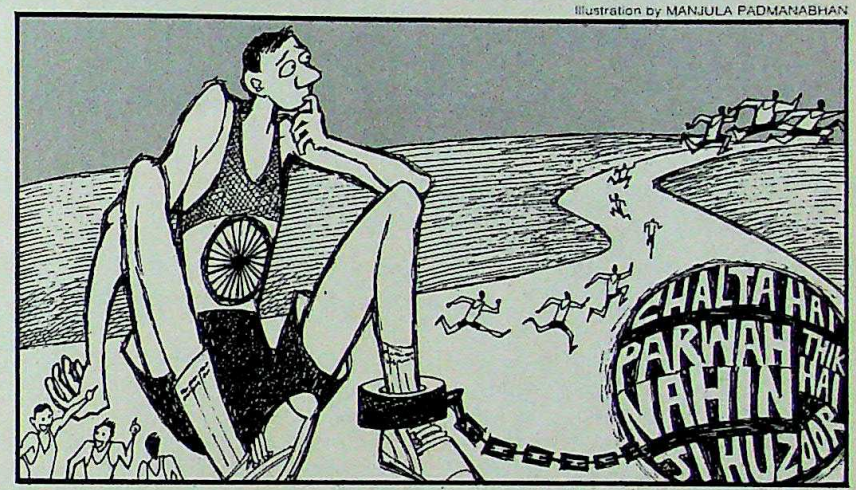
Those supposedly accountable for results will dutifully agree to any instructions and then later proffer the most ingenuous excuses to explain away their failures. Those at the helm of affairs, full of the importance of being important, give orders in every direction. These, however, are effectively sandpapered to death by the multitude of minions through whose hands the orders have to pass. Very little reaches the end of the tunnel, thus very little actually gets done. These superior officers console themselves by strutting about with an almost arrogant authority as they scramble for designations, positions and power. The politicians cynically play one against the other and make a mockery of all laws, rules or procedures.

As problems multiply, so do the government departments supposed to deal with them. Commissions, committees and councils proliferate. Paper work circulates madly, but nobody actually has his finger on the problem. The sharp cutting edge of the Government, as seen by the ordinary man, is the familiar thanedar, tehsildar, patwari, dealing clerk or inspector who is quite insulated from the consequences of his incompetence, laziness or corruption by the certainty that he cannot be sacked. Parallel to this is the generation of more and more laws which console the innocent that something is being done. Few, however, worry that laws are flagrantly violated by a judicial system that has virtually ceased to deliver any justice to the common man. *Ji huzoor* affirms the feudal respect given by the petty babus—as they exploit the opportunities of their position—to those in high authority who are far removed from the realities of the working world.

India's mental programming is partly the result of the historic importance always given to superior castes in clean jobs while others do the work, but, it is also part of our apeing of the socialist ideals of Britain and the USSR. It is therefore ironic that while both countries are debureaucratising their system to regain economic momentum in a changing world, India remains orthodox to an obsolete ideology.

The ultimate irony is that outside our sacred land, Indians are recognised as being among the hardest working and most intelligent people in the world. In the fields of nuclear science, medicine, computers, space and other global technological achievements, there are more Indian "back-room boys" than from any other race. They cut through foreign corporations like knives through butter. Indians thrive abroad, where there are rewards for hard work, intelligence and integrity with unquestioned punishment for failure. They, however, remain shockingly slothful in India where these priorities are exactly reversed.

Illustration by MANJULA PADMANABHAN



India does not have too many options. We can continue to console ourselves with platitudes and principles as we steadily slide downwards in every sphere, or we can adopt a bold pragmatic approach to shake the country out of its lethargy. The latter course will need political courage, and, in the short term, will certainly have political repercussions especially among those who have learned to live on half a day's wage for half a day's work. In the long term, however, everyone will prosper with progress—even the politicians.

Baig is public relations general manager for Escorts Ltd.

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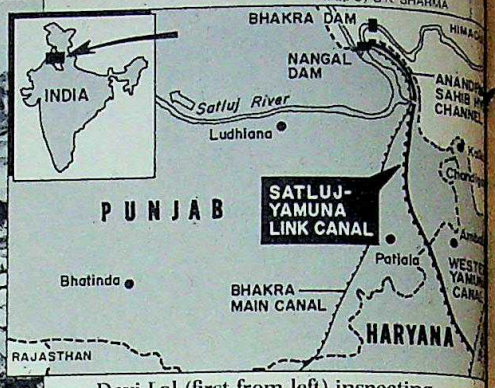

Devi Lal (first from left) inspecting construction work in Punjab: long wait

SYL CANAL

Troubled Waters

Despite promises, the project remains incomplete

FOR thousands of farmers in Haryana, trying to raise crops on barren land, the Satluj-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal scheme, when it was planned over a decade ago, was a dream come true. A 213-km-long concrete-lined water channel was to carry to Haryana its share of the Ravi and Beas waters. It was to irrigate about 3 lakh hectares of land and help produce 10 lakh tonnes of foodgrains a year. But with the project getting bogged down in a political quagmire, the only progress seemed to be in extending the deadlines set for the completion of the canal.

Now, after innumerable delays and abandoned promises, the project is still nowhere near conclusion, despite confident assertions made by the Punjab Government that it's in the final stages. Meanwhile, the cost of the canal has shot through the roof—over Rs 362.58 crore has already been spent on the entire canal as against the original estimate of Rs 66.45 crore in 1976. And another Rs 100 crore will have to be spent if the work is to be finished, according to official estimates which have changed at least 10 times in the last eight years.

Even these estimates are an understatement. For they haven't taken into account the damage caused by the floods this year to the portions already constructed. Using the floods as an excuse unscrupulous contractors and engineers of the various government organisations working on the SYL canal have promptly submitted revised cost estimates.

The slaying of 30 Bihari labourers in May by terrorists at one of the project sites is also being touted by the Punjab authorities as justification for the project's tardy progress—and cost-hike—in the last six months. But the Bihari labour has returned and still there are no signs of the work being speeded up. This, however, will not prevent the contractors, with a little help from colluding government officials, from getting their revised estimates sanctioned.

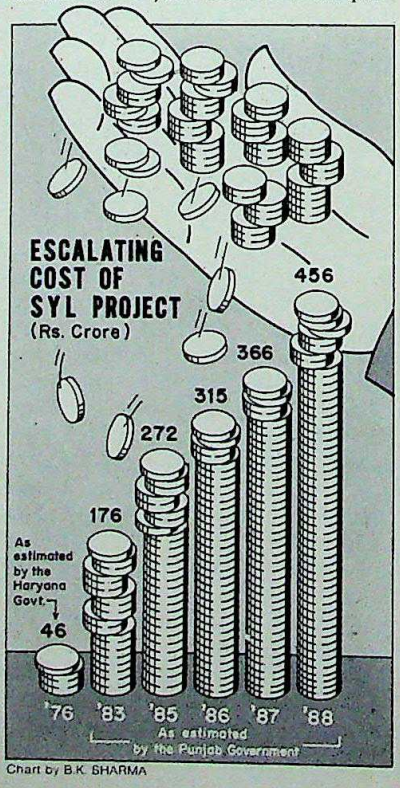

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

Escalating costs have been the one consistent feature of the project's execution ever since 1976 when the Haryana Government first submitted a report on the SYL scheme to the Centre. According to the original plan, Haryana was to construct 91.16 km of the canal and Punjab, 122 km. But the project never really got going as Punjab was not interested in diverting water to its neighbour.

So till 1980—the project's original deadline—the Punjab government did not even execute the land acquisition, while Haryana nearly finished its portion of the canal at a cost of Rs 28.30 crore, Rs 7 crore above the estimate. Punjab's reluctance was all the more striking because like Haryana, it too was ruled by the Congress(I) during this period. Regional aspirations, however, proved stronger than party affiliations and Punjab stood its ground despite pressure from the Centre. Finally, the Punjab government, headed by chief minister Darbara Singh, agreed to oblige Haryana. In December 1981 an agreement was signed between the chief ministers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan in the presence of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. The new deadline for the completion of the project was December 1983 and the estimated total cost Rs 204.3 crore.

Predictably, the deadline remained on paper once again and this time Punjab started blaming Haryana for inaction. It charged that Haryana,

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which was supposed to bear part of the cost of the canal's construction in Punjab, released no funds between 1982 and 1984. Work on the SYL project was restricted to scores of planning and review meetings, many of them attended by experts from the Central Water Commission. Hundreds of notifications and memoranda changed tables but nothing happened on the ground.

In one of the review meetings held in early 1984, the chief engineer of the canal claimed that land acquisition could not be completed at several places due to Haryana's reluctance to make payments to Punjab authorities. Again, the deadline was extended—to 1986.

The Centre, meanwhile, was planning its own political moves. Realising the electoral significance of the canal in Haryana, it played up the SYL agreement—a part of the Rajiv-Longowal accord of July 1985—and promised that the canal's conclusion would now face no hurdles. The Centre also decided to monitor Punjab's work on the project to meet the new deadline, August 15, 1986.

But the promises and the hopes were belied again as the much vaunted Punjab accord came unstuck. The SYL canal was just one of the clauses of the accord which never got translated into reality. So the canal crossed its third deadline too, with the cost estimates jumping to Rs 366 crore for the Punjab part alone.

THE next upsurge of interest in the project came in December 1986, a few months before the Haryana Assembly elections when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi declared that the Centre would bear the entire cost of the SYL canal's construction. The Centre kept its word for once and, when the money started pouring in, the Haryana authorities requested Punjab to finish work by the end of 1987. Their counterparts in Punjab agreed as usual, but then resorted to a go-slow. The date of the canal's completion was again extended by another year, despite Punjab drawing a total of Rs 349.94 crore from the Centre (till July, Rs 334.28 crore had been spent).

For all the tortuous deviations the project has gone through, the Punjab administration insists that the progress on the SYL scheme is impressive. According to Rajinder Singh, secretary, Irrigation Department of the Punjab Government, the position is satisfactory on the three major fronts. "We have completed 100 per cent of the land acquisition work, 95 per cent of earth work and more than 88 per cent of the lining work." The remaining jobs, he says, should be over within a few months.

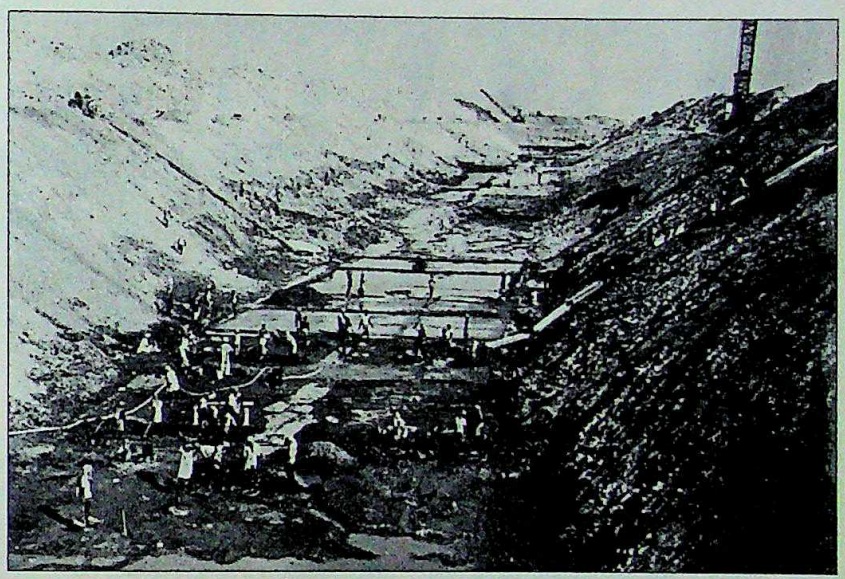
The calculations made by INDIA TODAY, however, show the figures for what they are—a clever manipulation of statistics. The percentages refer only to the straight stretches of the canal. Other important work like construction of bridges and cross-drainage works hasn't gone beyond the first stages.

For instance, the canal authorities have fully built only 31 bridges out of a total 76. While work is half-complete in 12 more bridges, construction is still in the initial stages in the remainder ones. Similarly, only two out of 11 major cross drainage works have been completed in the last eight years. And the situation is as grim regarding the total 41 medium and small cross drainage works with only 17 having been finished so far. The cost of these delays will be at least Rs 50 crore—this, according to conservative estimates.

There are even bigger bottlenecks elsewhere. The work on the Sirsa aqueduct, for example. Work on this cross-linkage construction which requires at least six months of non-stop labour has still not begun. The reason: a legal battle between the authorities and a contractor. A stay order was vacated last month, but work is yet to be allotted to another contractor.

The other major bottleneck is the dispute since 1980 between Punjab and Haryana over an interlink channel which Punjab proposes to construct in order to install a hydro-power generation plant. The channel would link the Nangal hydel channel with the SYL canal. Haryana wants the power to be shared according to an inter-state resolution but Punjab refuses to share the generated power.

To add to the problems, Haryana also demands that the control of the water regulatory systems of the channel should not lie with the Punjab authorities. Says Rajinder Singh: "It is unfortunate that the Haryana Government is not letting us control a small power plant of only 36 MW." Haryana's Irrigation and Power Minister Verender Singh, on the other hand, insists that the control of water should be given to the Bhakra Beas Management Board, which is an autonomous agency.



Work in progress on a portion of the canal: interminable delays

Amidst all these controversies, the latest deadline for the SYL canal's completion, December 1988, also now seems to be out of reach. The Punjab administration itself has informed the Haryana Government that the work on its part of the canal is unlikely to finish before March 1989. Top officials of both the state governments agree that even this is a very optimistic possibility.

The one factor which may finally help complete the project is political. With the general elections approaching, observers are confident that the SYL project will be concluded before mid-1989 because that would help the Congress(I) prove its bonafides before the Haryana electorate. But as the project meanders through the byways and alleys of political calculations, the hope which had sprung up among the farmers of Haryana has now all but dried up.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

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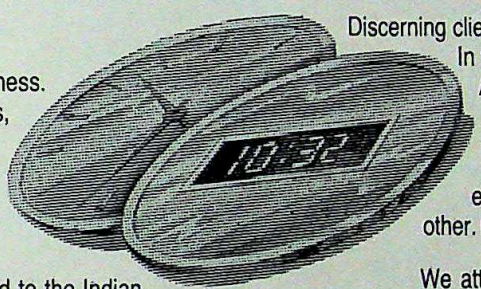

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ENGINEERING COLLEGES

Wired for Trouble

A shortfall of quality teachers threatens to worsen

INDIA has the third largest bank of technically trained manpower in the world and this bank will continue to grow apace until the country enters the bright new age of the 21st century in a burst of industrial growth and technological sophistication. That, of course, is the standard supposition.

The reality is something else. Quietly, a crisis is building in the unlikeliest of places: the engineering college staff room. While work might seem normal in these 300-odd centres of advanced learning around the country, professors and principals as well as the mandarins of education are deeply worried. They simply can't get good enough people to join their faculties. Vacancies in engineering colleges have increased by 50 to 60 per cent over the last decade, standing now at about a quarter of sanctioned posts.

If the present is disturbing, a look at the future seems frightening. Government projections indicate that the nation will need about 60,000 technical teachers by the turn of the century if the desired industrial growth rate of 10 per cent is to be achieved. The present number isn't even a third of that. And the worst hit are the growth areas, sophisticated fields such as space and ocean engineering, robotics and informatics.

As industry boomed over the last few years, and the brain drain gurgled on, the brightest engineering graduates have been lost to research and teaching jobs within the country. Even the prestigious Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have felt the pinch. "We get only the rejects," says R.C. Malhotra, deputy director (faculty) at the Delhi institute. A study conducted by the Bombay institute found that 25 to 35 per cent of its graduates go abroad. Another quarter go into marketing and management. And these are mostly from the top drawer. A 1986 IIT review committee noted, that with a spate of retirements due, "the academic functions now being carried out in the institutes are in danger of a collapse unless a vigorous drive is launched to attract competent youth."

With the IITs in a tail-spin, the situation is worse in the run of the mill engineering colleges. In some Karnataka colleges, almost the entire faculty consists of ad hoc staff, working engineers—often with only a bachelor degree—who take classes in their spare time. Vacancies as high as 50 per cent had become commonplace a few years ago, when a worried government relaxed the eligibility criteria. The result: dismal quality. "You may have filled the positions, but with what kind of people?" says S.K. Srivastava, joint educational adviser (technical) in the Human Resource Development Ministry.

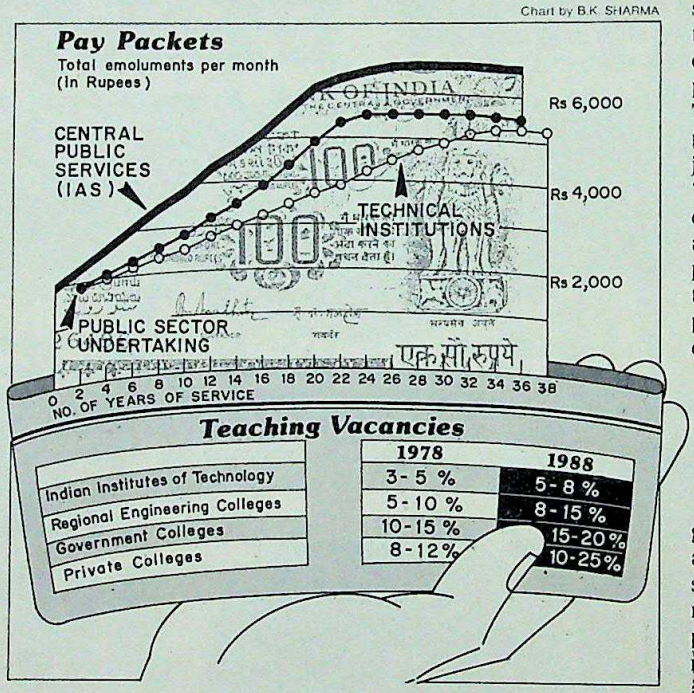
The ministry gets a regular stream of letters from students complaining of teaching standards. Yet, it has been chary. After a year-and-a-half of fretting and shuffling over a fresh package of pay and facilities for engineering teachers, a proposal finally went up for cabinet approval last month. It recommends better facilities for engineering teachers but stops short of increasing the number of teaching cadres to facilitate faster promotions. This was one of the crucial recommendations of the National Expert Committee headed by R.N. Dogra, former director of the Delhi IIT, which submitted its report in April, 1987.

The Government feels that giving a better deal to engineering teachers than to other teachers in the same university would lead to problems. Engineering teachers argue that this is a blinkered view for they are not really in competition with teachers of the arts and pure sciences and have lucrative opportunities in industry, laboratories and public works departments. To draw the best to academia requires that teaching jobs be made attractive. "Unless engineering teachers get the same scales as their equivalents in the public or even private sectors, things will not improve," says P.J. George, executive secretary of the government-funded Indian Society for Technical Education.

However, he and other technical education planners further argue that pay scales are not all. The working atmosphere and status of technical teachers must be improved as well. This argument the Government has accepted. One of the crucial moves in the new package provides for closer collaboration between training institutes and industry. Professors will now be able to accept technical fees for projects they undertake, along with their assistants and students, for an industry. Research scholars, who get a stipend of Rs 1,800 or more a month, will also be required to help in teaching undergraduates. Funds are also to be made available for a variety of incentives ranging from housing to an allowance for books.

While the details of the package will be eagerly watched by engineering teachers, some are rattled at the Government's reluctance to move with urgency. An angry Dogra puts it pithily: "We talk of excellence but we do everything against it." —DAVID DEVADAS

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



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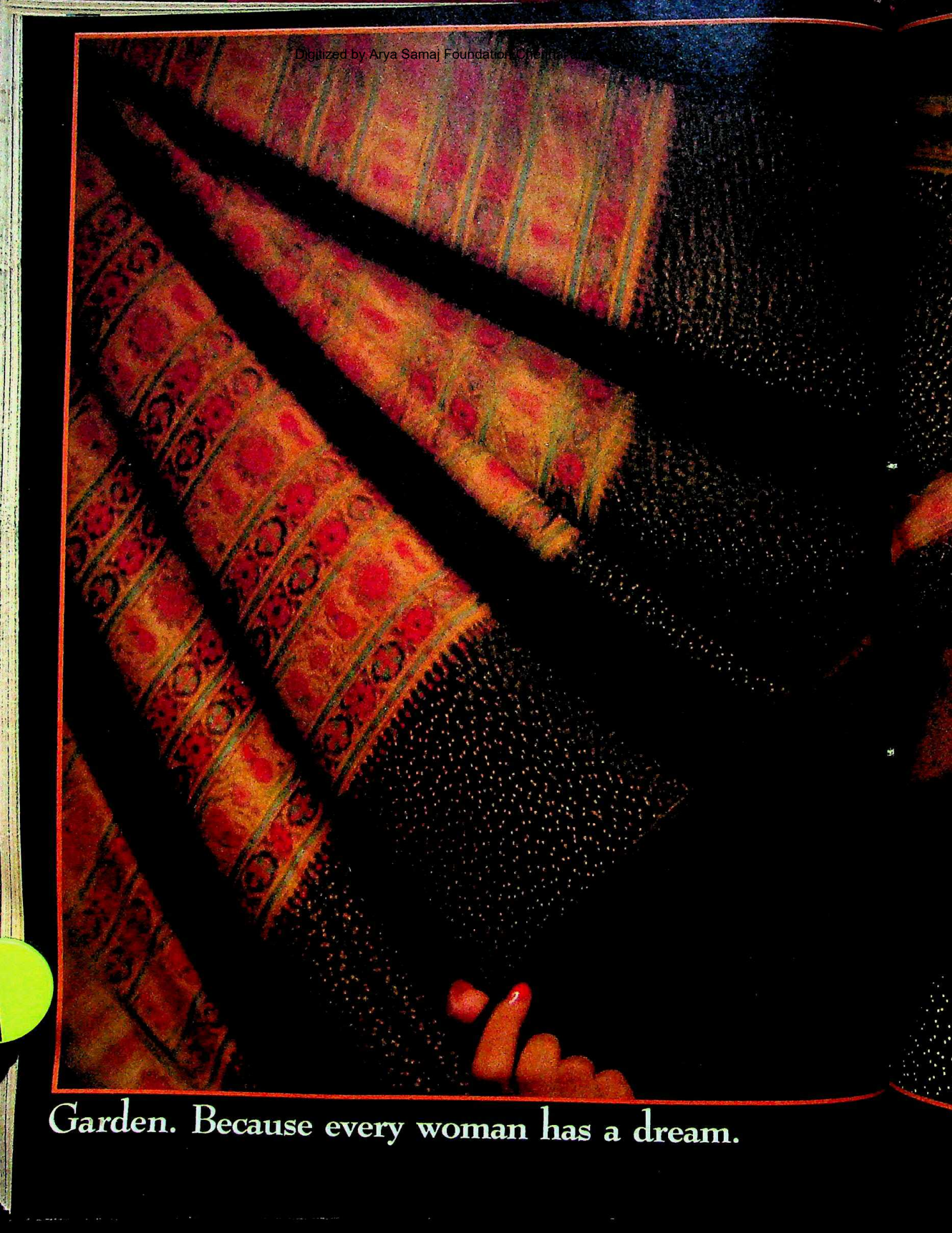

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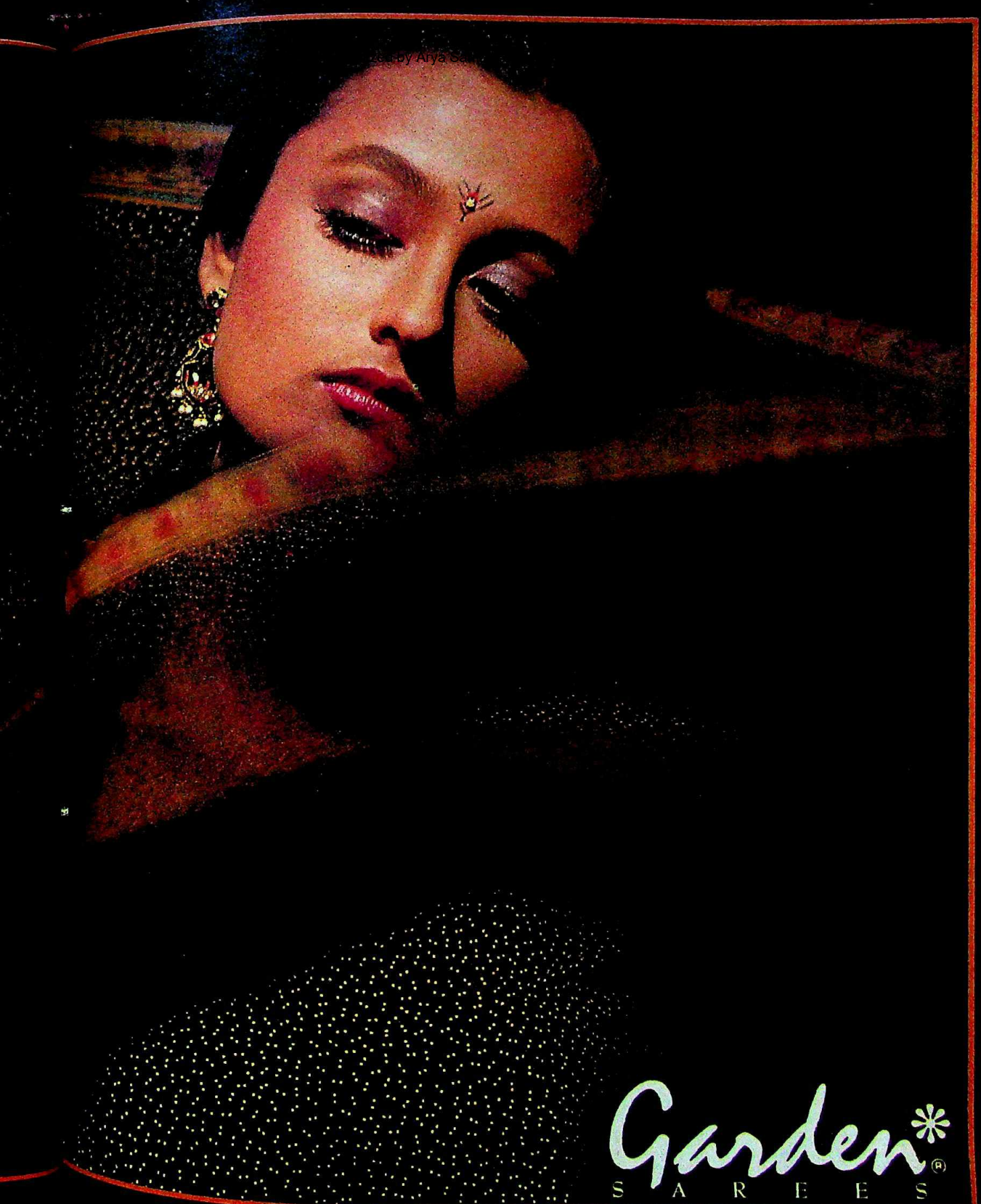

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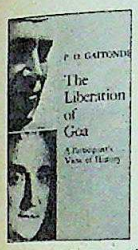
Through Tinted Glasses

A personal but unconvincing view of Goa's liberation

THE LIBERATION OF GOA:
A PARTICIPANT'S VIEW OF HISTORY
by P.D. GAITONDE
Oxford University Press
Price: Rs 140; Pages: 176



EVEN though his name figured prominently in Goa's freedom struggle, Dr P.D. Gaitonde hasn't been much heard of ever since Goa was liberated. Now, after 27 years in the shadows, he has come out to give his participant's view—of how he saw the struggle and what he did to keep up its tempo in the face of resolute inaction by India's leaders.

The reader may be forgiven for thinking that the author has waited all this time because whatever he has to reveal was too sensitive to be told earlier. Alas, there is little in his book that has not been more fully reported in earlier accounts. If anything, it resembles a painstakingly compiled white paper by some government-appointed committee—so heavily does it rely upon inordinately long quotations from official pronouncements, resolutions of political parties and statements by minor world leaders long since forgotten.

Goa to the Goan is a state of mind, to be viewed in a state of euphoric bliss such as might be brought on by *feni*—even that crusty realist, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel saw the Goan question as one of sentiment. But Gaitonde himself eschews all sentiments. All that can be said is that his viewpoint is robustly, unflinchingly Goan. Not for him any such nonsense as a love-hate relationship with the ruling race; to him they were just oppressors and tyrants, and all they deserved was to be flung out of Goa as quickly and painlessly as possible.

He argues that the Goans were far more intolerant of their colonial masters than the Indians were of theirs; indeed, that the earlier efforts of the Goans to overthrow Portuguese rule were somehow "far more successful". But he refuses to concede that, in the concluding stages, and particularly after the movement against British rule led by Mahatma Gandhi began to assume the dimension of a national wave, the Goan freedom struggle merged into the Indian one. After that, for all practical purposes, the Goan liberation struggle was sustained from India and administered frequent doses of blood transfusions to keep it alive. And as the long-awaited day of India's freedom drew closer, the Goans assumed that their own freedom too "would come automatically".

How wrong they were. It took another 14 years and a military operation to drive the Portuguese out—mainly because many in Goa obviously did not want them to quit. Precisely what their number was will never be known, but the author dismisses their strength as being quite insignificant. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, however—who had loftily announced that, as far as Goa was concerned, he would abide by the twin principles of the people's wishes and non-use of force—was not sure that a plebiscite, even if one were to be held, would turn out in India's favour. Oddly enough, Dr Antonio de Oliveria Salazar, Portugal's dictator, also distrusted a plebiscite. "And suppose we lose?" he asked a colleague.

With both sides shying away from a plebiscite, the stalemate continued and it seemed as if the fire was going out of Goa's freedom movement. But people like Gaitonde, exploiting their close contacts with Indian leaders, managed to sustain the tempo by whipping up public opinion in India and Goa to the point where it became the sport of local strongmen to set themselves up as leaders of voluntary bands of liberators and march into Portuguese enclaves, waving flags and bent on provoking a reaction.

It would have been interesting if Gaitonde had been able to shed some light on how and why Nehru was finally shaken loose from his "yogic detachment". Was it the quite farcical situation which had developed when two Portuguese enclaves were actually 'liberated' by local bands and ceremoniously handed over to India's administrators? Or was Nehru, as many believe, dragooned into sanctioning a military operation by two of his most trusted advisors, General B.M. Kaul and Krishna Menon—one for a glorious whiff of an easy military victory for which his heart craved, the other to help him along in a crucial election battle?

A betrayal! Thus screamed Lord Mountbatten, no doubt with one eye fixed on the uneasy parallel with Britain's own firm grip over Gibraltar. Even in India, the reaction to the use of force was not altogether adulatory. A principle had been sacrificed for the sake of expediency, or, as Nehru explained, "to the compulsion of events."

Not that Dr Gaitonde believes any sort of an explanation was even called for. His is self-professedly a participant's view. But not, as he would like to believe, of history—oh, no.

—MANOHAR MALGONKAR

EXTRACT

...I saw Morarji Desai, then Chief Minister of Bombay State, and known for his very clear-cut ideas on all matters, political and non-political. One of the first things he said was that Goans had not sacrificed enough to deserve freedom and that those who advised the use of force to liberate Goa must be Portuguese spies. He was not there to help solve the Goa problem; it was for the Goans to solve it.

...It was clear that the Indian Embassy in the United States was deliberately seeking to dissociate itself from any anti-colonial movement, particularly regarding Goa—almost a case of Yogic detachment. The Government of India was only interested in the general good of the humanity, present and future. India might or might not benefit in the process, but that was immaterial—the future welfare of the whole world was what took the first place. However ridiculous this may seem, this was then the *ideal image of India.*

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Bharat Darshan

Looking at the bright side

THE OTHER FACE OF INDIA
by M.V. KAMATH
Konark
Price: Rs 60; Pages: 139

TWO things must be said about Kamath. His heart is in the right place and he is an incorrigible optimist.

These are good and cheerful qualities to have, particularly in one who takes us on a selective Bharat Darshan. This was his voyage of discovery of India after having lived abroad for 20 years. At the end of it all, he continues to have faith in the country's future, despite the beggars dying in the streets, despite the corruption and skulduggery of politicians, despite the many miseries of Calcutta and despite the benighted state of Bihar.

Kamath's motive in undertaking trips to the various states was to rediscover his roots after his long absence abroad, particularly because he had been called home to India to take over the editorship of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*.

Being of a sunny disposition, Kamath looks at the bright side of things: the drive of the Punjabis and Haryanvis, the charm of the people of the North-east, the sylvan surroundings of Himachal Pradesh, the managerial skill of the Gujaratis, the tolerance of the Kannadigas and the Goans' capacity to enjoy themselves to the hilt. Reading the account, one has sometimes to pinch oneself to realise that one is not reading a tourist guide to the states traversed. But it is, in any event, readable.

Only rarely does Kamath's optimism desert him. He went to Bihar after disclosure of the Bhagalpur blindings; everyone in the state from the chief minister down pretended they didn't know about them earlier. He gets angry with the way politics is played in the unwieldy state of Madhya Pradesh. He positively disliked the late unlamented Raj Narain. Doubtless, the provocation has to be great to make Kamath angry and caustic.

The most moving part of the book is the account of the first six pages. Kamath recounts how he was offered the chance to return home and how a visit to San Francisco helped him to set up a meeting with his American wife, from whom he had separated, before leaving the US. One wishes Kamath had made his tale of rediscovery of India more personalised and more impressionistic.

For the Indian reader, who can discover the tourist and other attractions of the country for himself through visits or guidebooks, the value of a travelogue such as this lies in the personal insights of the author. There are, to be sure, flashes of humour in Kamath's account, but he seems so eager to tell the reader all about the treasures he has seen that in the process he keeps his own impressions, except for the more general ones, under a tight leash.

Perhaps Kamath will write a sequel to this rediscovery of India to tell us not merely about his horror on seeing the dying beggars and the culture shock he received upon returning home, but about how he relates to the roots that he has now rediscovered. He attempts it in an off-hand, sarcastic way in the final few pages but leaves the reader with the impression that he hides more than he reveals.

—S. NIHAL SINGH

High Romance

Glimpses of Gaddis' life

OVER THE HIGH PASSES
by CHRISTINA NOBLE
Published by Collins, London
Distributed by Rupa & Co
Price: Rs 44; Pages: 208

THERE are a handful of nomadic tribes in the Himalayas who follow set routes in a seasonal journey for greener pastures. The Gaddis, whose flock consists of sheep and goats, undertake a circular route of around 400 miles, rarely doing more than five miles a day.

In contrast to the rushed itinerary of the tourist, the book ambles along at an easy pace. There is time to savour and absorb the many tranquil moments captured with lasting effect in the timeframe of Noble's delicate prose. With deft brush strokes she paints several 'Rembrandt-like' interiors, with the warm embers of pine-resin fires lighting up the glowing, fresh faces of rugged Gaddis grouped around. She even confides that if she had a last wish on her deathbed, it would be "the view from Deori". The gentle pace is guided by a general itinerary to reach Lahoul in time for the flock to feed on the blue grass which they relish, and on which they thrive. The only urgency in the journey comes on the trek south, when it becomes necessary to cross the Kugti Pass (16,000 ft), before the first snow.

Sharing their life, but not their homes and only occasionally their 'rajma, rice and suji-ka-halwa', Noble's empathy with the Gaddis is apparent as she pin-points with clarity what their future requirements are. Their greatest need is to be left alone to follow a life-style passed down to them through the centuries. Foreign experts, forestry officials, who are trying to wean the Gaddis away from goat-rearing because "their destructive hooves cause damage", would be well-advised to take a more practical approach. The goat is by far the more profitable animal providing the Gaddis with milk and wool for their own needs, besides bringing in good prices for its long hair and meat.

But these "simple, virtuous and comely" people, warm in their affections and sincere in their loyalties are by no means a "vanishing race". Intricate though their caste structures may be, the identity of the Gaddis is enough to unite them as one people and a great sense of *joie de vivre* marks their festive meetings—"their natural hilarity enhanced by deep potations". Their life, though hard, provides them with a lucrative income over and above that of settled farmers, enabling them to purchase prized farming acres at prices higher than the local villagers', causing resentment in the lush Kangra 'valley' where some have chosen to settle.

The Gaddis' soul, though, will always belong to Gadderan, where a slip of the foot in those stark, bleak regions means instant death. Though tending to romanticise their hard life, Noble succeeds in bringing alive these 'transhumant' people with sensitivity and compassion. Now settled in Manali with her Indian husband and two children, she divides her time between Islington and India. One hopes she can help the Gaddis retain their identity, and save them from well-meaning but bungling bureaucrats' attempts to 'civilise' them.

—REHANA SEN

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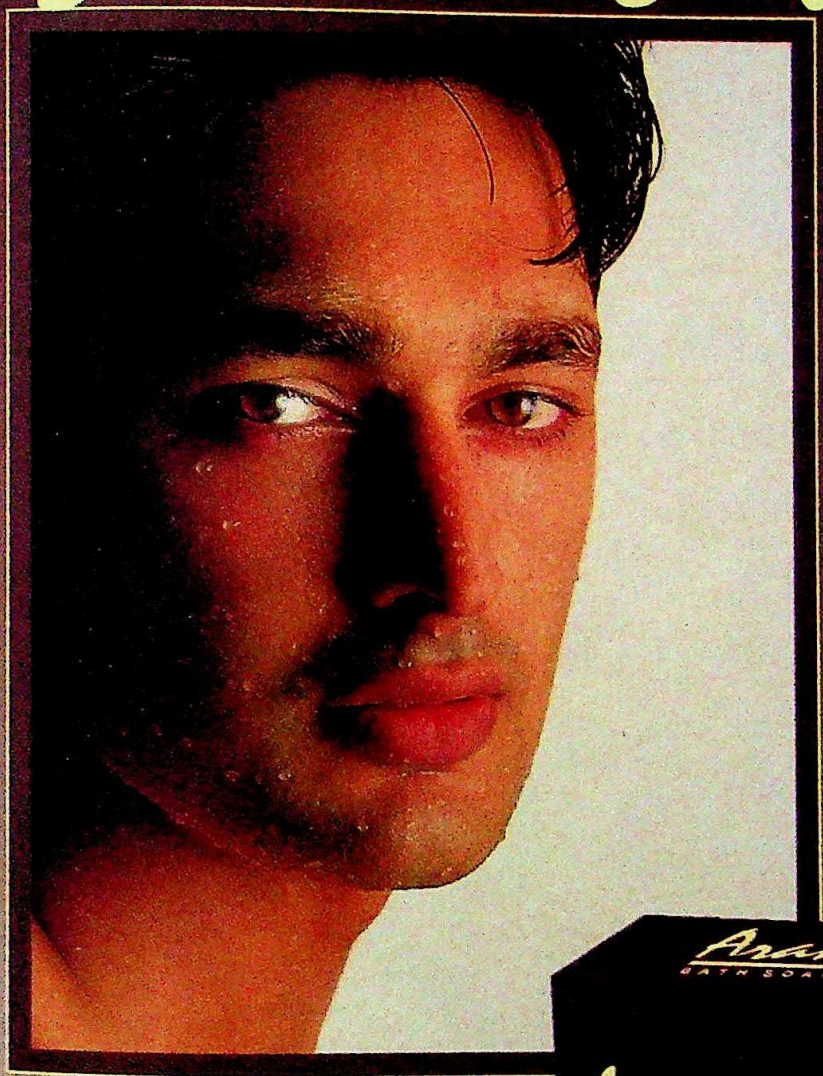

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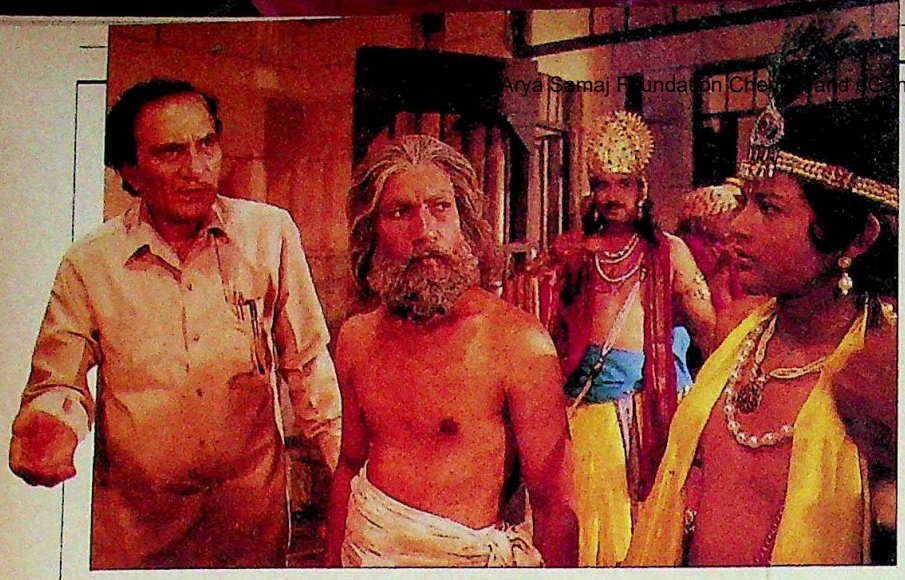


Chopra (extreme left) on the sets

MAHABHARAT

A Political Statement

B.R. Chopra's serial promises to be another bonanza

DESTINY at last caught up with Doordarshan. After months of controversy and confusion, the *Mahabharat* is finally on the air. And in keeping with the popular belief that discord always follows in the wake of the great epic, the telecast of the very first episode of B.R. Chopra's spectacular production triggered debate about the serial's unusual opening sequence.

The *Mahabharat* as we know it, begins with King Shantanu's fatal attraction for the Goddess Ganga, who emerges in human form on the banks of the river to fulfil a heavenly curse. The king's reckless passion sows the seed of the fratricidal conflict which dominates the epic and ultimately results in the destruction of the Kuru tribe.

But Chopra's *Mahabharat* takes the story further back in time, to King Bharat's visionary perception of monarchy. Bharat, according to legend, appointed an outsider, Bhumnayu, as his successor as he did not consider any of his nine sons fit to govern Hastinapur. Several generations later, Shantanu broke the tradition of appointing only the wisest and most capable man as the ruler, and set in motion events which led to the Kurukshetra war. By placing Shantanu's failure in the context of Bharat's extraordinary political sagacity, the first episode of Chopra's *Mahabharat* created a dramatic focus on one of the strands running through the epic—the legitimacy of power.

In one brilliant stroke, not only does Chopra's *Mahabharat* become contemporary in comparison to Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*, but it also becomes politically explosive. Invariably, the question of whether power should be inherited or acquired by merit creates interesting allusions to modern-day political dynasties on the subcontinent. For viewers, the comparison would be with the Nehru family.

It helps also to have Raj Babbar, V.P. Singh's most glamorous supporter, playing the role of wise King Bharat. Did Doordarshan ask Chopra to delete several minutes from the opening sequence because of its anxiety about the political allusions contained in the *Mahabharat* serial? Who ordered the cuts—the then director-general Bhaskar Ghose, Information and Broadcasting Minister H.K.L. Bhagat or, the prime minister himself?

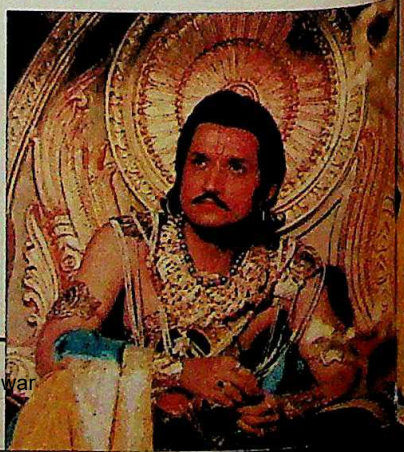
Doordarshan sources maintained that the first few episodes of the serial were previewed by Ghose and members of the screening committee. But Mandi House did ask Chopra to make some cuts for "technical reasons".

Chopra himself insisted the cuts were made during editing, and not on Doordarshan's orders. "Our job is not to draw parallels with anybody," said Chopra. "Our job is to tell the story of *Mahabharat* as we saw it. We would love it if Rajiv Gandhi saw it. But if he had we would have heard about it."

But the switch in the first episode from Bharat's durbar to his mother Shakuntala's chamber is abrupt, as is the transition from Bharat's reign to Shantanu's. The cuts ordered by Doordarshan relate to this sequence. In the uncensored version

Nitesh Bharadwaj as Lord Krishna

Debashree Roy as Satyawati and Mukesh Khanna as Bhishma; (below) Rishabh Shukla as King Shantanu



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Bharat defends further his decision to deny his sons their right to the throne and reportedly declares that "the king's duty is to consider the welfare of the kingdom, and not the welfare of his sons"

The idea is expressed again in the second episode through Shantanu's son Devavrata (later transformed to Bhishma), who stops the charioteer from hailing the *rajkumar* by pronouncing that the *rajya* is greater than either the king or his son. And once Bhishma's greatness is established, the next two episodes are devoted entirely to Shantanu's failure to uphold the high principles set by King Bharat. Once again, Doordarshan asked for cuts in the fourth episode when the serial dwells overlong on Shantanu's predicament.

For screenplay writer Rahi Masoom Raza, the question of political legitimacy is one of the central themes of the *Mahabharat*. Explaining the decision to introduce Bharat in the initial episode, Raza said: "Without Bharat we would not have got the spine of the story. He makes a political statement which predates even the *Ramayan*—that *karm* and not *janam* gives the right to rule. Today, political conditions are similar to those during the time of *Mahabharat*."

Nevertheless, Chopra's *Mahabharat* is likely to work the same magic on the audience as Sagar's *Ramayan*, even though the longer epic is considered a secular rather than a religious text. In terms of production, Chopra promises a serial far superior to Sagar's which so mesmerised the faithful.

BUT Chopra suffers from a major handicap. Against the galaxy of gods in *Ramayan*, *Mahabharat* has the lone figure of Krishna, the supreme incarnation of Vishnu. But in the epic, as scholar Iravati Karve pointed out, Krishna is "wholly human... a warrior and philosopher... with no resemblance at all to the flute-playing lover of milkmaids, the divine child or the miracle-worker of later tradition." Krishna also appears in the epic only as an adult.

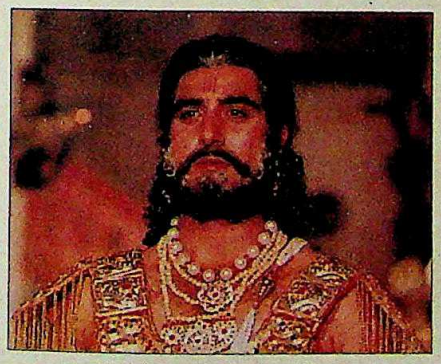
But not in Chopra's *Mahabharat*. Five episodes, beginning with the 10th, dwell on Krishna's early life and finally, as the flute-playing, weapon-wielding god who figures prominently till the 52nd, and for the moment, final episode. "There's no *Mahabharat* without Lord Krishna, so it's not as if we are trying to specially project him," contends Chopra's son Ravi, who co-directs.

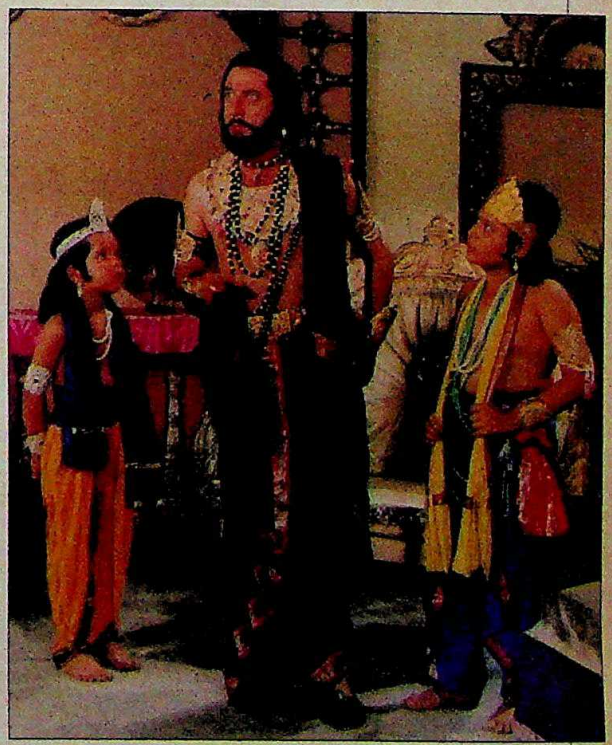
Now busy shooting the 19th episode, the Chopras selected an unknown Marathi stage and film actor to play the crucial role of Krishna. Like Arun Govil, Nitesh Bharadwaj, 25, a former veterinary doctor, is certain to be catapulted to fame and almost-divine glory. Admits Bharadwaj: "Krishna is a pioneer of democracy in India. I feel a great responsibility taking on the role."

He'll appear only after the 20th episode. By then, of course, it will be clear whether the Chopras or the Sagars win the battle for the television audience's hearts and minds. For, beginning November 27, the 26-episode *Ramayan* Part II comes on the air.

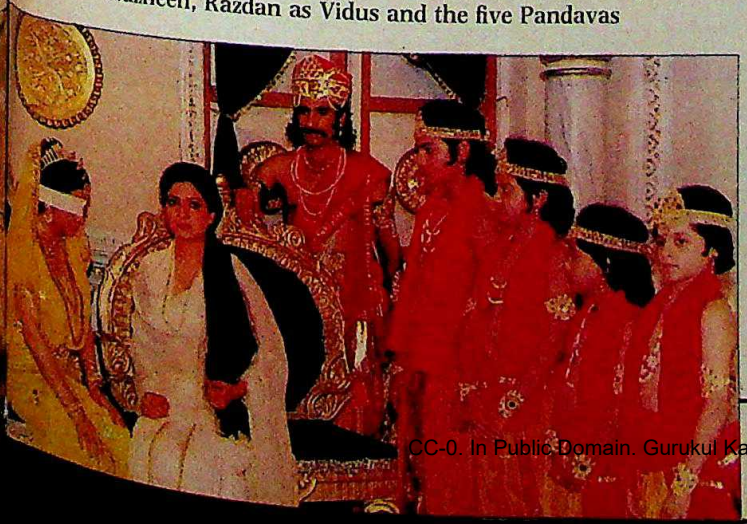
From next month, Sunday mornings will be crowded with epic battles—between gods and men, between Hindi film moghuls-turned-TV producers, and between cash-rich advertisers clamouring for a popular TV programme. Even before the viewership ratings for *Mahabharat* came in, Doordarshan was charging advertisers Rs 65,000 for a 10-second spot, the second highest rate on TV. For the early episodes, it will rake in upwards of Rs 25 lakh. For the 78-episode *Ramayan* Part I, Mandi House grossed an estimated Rs 18 crore. Now with an equal number of episodes split between two serials, it stands to make the same amount of money. Whatever the wise King Bharat might say about the right to rule, the kingdom will eventually collect the cash.

—M. RAHMAN





Nazneen as Kunti (above left); Raj Babbar as King Bharat; and (below) Renuka Israni as Gandhari, Nazneen, Razdan as Vidus and the five Pandavas



Guji Paintal as Shakuni

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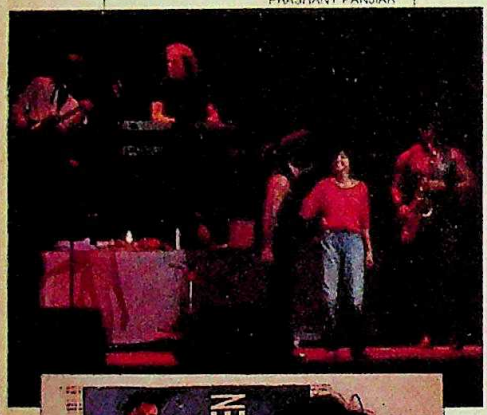
Gipsa Makker: car kid

◆ She stops traffic and she's just five. **Gipsa Makker** drives a car—after a unique fashion, as she did in Connaught Place last week. She crouches for the clutch, then reaches for the wheel, her 3 ft frame allowing her to drive only piece-meal. But she already has a fan following. The cops on the tough Rohtang-Manali route were so stunned, they clean forgot to *challan* her. Gipsa—no, she wasn't christened after the Gypsy—drives a blue Maruti. But can't wait to get on to bigger things. "When can I fly a plane?" she asks. Going by her record, she may be up there sooner than she knows.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

PRASHANT PANJIAR



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

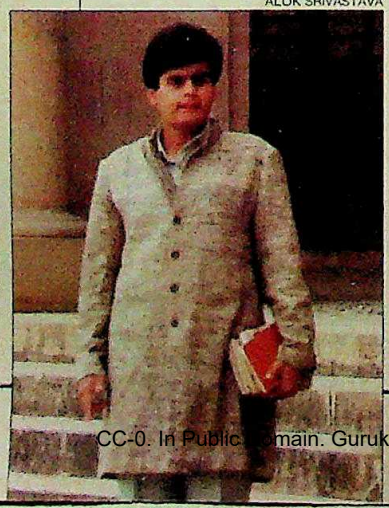
Shefalika (inset) dancing with the Boss

◆ "New Delhi can dance!" complimented Bruce Springsteen. And how! At the Human Rights concert, he had Delhiites swinging with his E Street Band. But for a full five minutes it was **Shefalika Mishra** who stole the show. The 18-year-old, pretty Maurya trainee was the lucky one to boogie with the Boss. And the 60,000-strong crowd roared its approval. So, how was it *Dancing in the Dark* with the Boss? "Just like dancing with any good-looking man," insisted his fan, but admitted: "His physique has improved since he sang *Tunnel of Love*!" And "Mr Springsteen's" kiss? "That was so natural," said the 5 ft 5 inch-tall picture of poise.

◆ The defence minister's son in jail? Yes, **Sunil Pant** recently spent a whole day behind bars with real prisoners. And, he actually felt it was the greatest moment of his life. That was while filming *Moments*, the ongoing serial directed by noted film maker Prakash Jha. The ex-Stephenian plays Govind Ballabh Pant in his formative years. "It came naturally to me," says Sunil. That's hardly surprising considering it's his grandfather he's portraying. "I did it as a tribute." As for politics: that's taboo.

Sunil Pant in *Moments*: tribute to grandpa

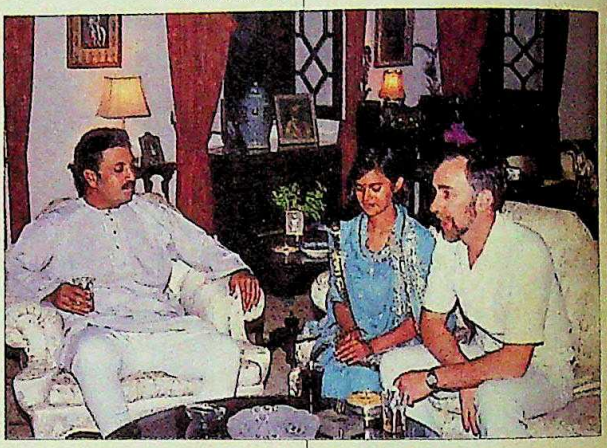
ALOK SRIVASTAVA



◆ There are more ways than one of coming down to earth. Even for cosmonauts, as India's **Rakesh Sharma** discovered recently. Sharma narrowly escaped major injury after ejecting from a MIG 21 he was test-flying near Nasik. His parachute snagged on low tension cables and Sharma fell, breaking his left ankle. Now he's recuperating in a Pune clinic and receiving bigwigs including Chief Minister Sharad Pawar who came bearing flowers. The free fall had obviously not affected his spirits. Displaying his bandaged left foot, Sharma joked he'd become a leftist after being in Russia so long. As for the parachute: "I'll transform it into a garden umbrella."

Rakesh Sharma: free fall

◆ Got a dream? Well, *Jim'll Fix it*. **Shefali Bates**, 11—an adopted girl from Bangladesh—wanted to be a princess. No, not a Princess Diana, but an Indian rajkumari, "as they're so much prettier". So she wrote to the BBC show and last week got a taste of royalty at Jodhpur's Umaid Bhawan Palace as Maharaja Gaj Singh's guest. While Shefali played the gracious princess to the hilt, said father John Bates: "It's a culture-shock; it's just mind-blowing." Added Shefali happily: "I did not in my wildest dreams think this would really happen." But then, some dreams do come true.



Shefali and Bates with the maharaja (left)

SURESH MALHOTRA

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How Safe?

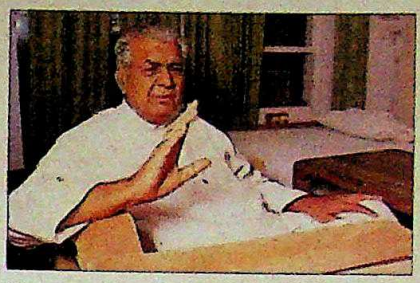
Two air disasters, within a few hours of each other, represented the blackest day in the country's aviation history. The crashes raised troubling questions about the domestic airlines' safety standards. An in-depth report attempts to answer the questions.

COVER STORY 80

Tasting Democracy

The coming general elections in Pakistan represent a momentous watershed in the country's 41-year-old history. For the first time in 11 years, there is a real chance for democracy. An on-the-spot analysis of the pre-election scenario.

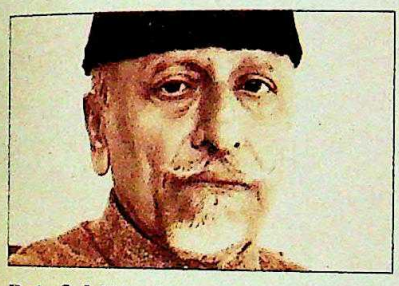
SPECIAL REPORTS 24



Succession War

The succession battle between Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal's two sons has created a major crisis in the state and the Lok Dal. With powerful sections of the state administration split into the two camps, the crisis has significant political implications.

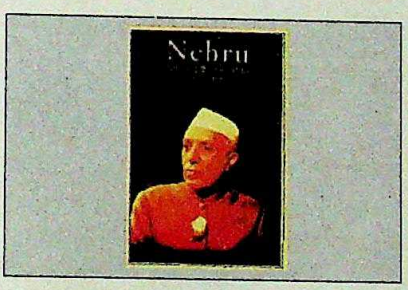
SPECIAL REPORTS 36



Painful Disclosures

The coming release of the unexpurgated version of Maulana Azad's controversial book is certain to be a bombshell for the ruling party. The chapters obtained by INDIA TODAY expose the giants of the freedom struggle in bad light.

SPECIAL FEATURE 102



Nehru's Magic

M.J.Akbar's biography on Jawaharlal Nehru is to be released shortly. INDIA TODAY presents extracts from the book that focus on how Nehru foiled a British plan to Balkanise India, his controversial love life and his final moments.

BOOKS 150

The China Syndrome

Indian crockery has finally come of age. Suddenly, the market is flooded with home-made bone china that compares favourably with the best. With competition hotting up, exquisite new designs and shapes are adorning dining tables.

LIFE-STYLE 160

CONTENTS

COMMENT 11
CAPITALOOK 14
VOICES 19
INDIANOTES 21
THE FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 22
SPECIAL REPORTS
Pakistan: Tasting Democracy 24
Punjab: Madness Without Method 28
Haryana: Succession War 36
Sri Lanka: On the Brink 40
Rajiv Gandhi: Empty Promises 49
CURRENT EVENTS
General Elections:
The Countdown Begins 54
Kisan Rally: Farmers' Force 55
Assam: Fighting Back 56
Darjeeling: Return to Peace 61
DCM: Political Imbroglio 67
Vyjanthimala: A Test of Wills 70
Kerala: Toddy Tussle 75
COVER STORY
Indian Airlines/Vayudoot:
How Safe? 80
STATENOTES 92
SPECIAL FEATURES
Maulana Azad: Painful Disclosures 102
GLOBE-TROTTING
USA:
Shallow Theatrics, Cynical Rhetoric 112
TRADE WINDS 115
BUSINESS
Reliance and L&T: A Grand Alliance 116
RPG Enterprises: Back in Business 118
Universal Luggage: Monopoly Move 126
West Bengal: A Wave of Closures 131
Air-India: First Class Row 132
Stock Exchanges:
Broking New Ground 137
The Markets: Sharp Upswing 144
THE ECONOMY MONITOR 149
BOOKS
Nehru's Magic 150
Tamil Literature:
Purveyors of Pulp 158
LIFE-STYLE
Crockery: The China Syndrome 160
MEDIAWATCH 163
CINEMA
Dayavan: Violent Messiah 166
LAW
Law Commission:
Clouds of Controversy 171
SCIENCE
Medicine: The Wonder Beam 174
SCIENCENOTES 182
SPORTS
Astroturf: Slippery Surface 187
EYE-CATCHERS 192

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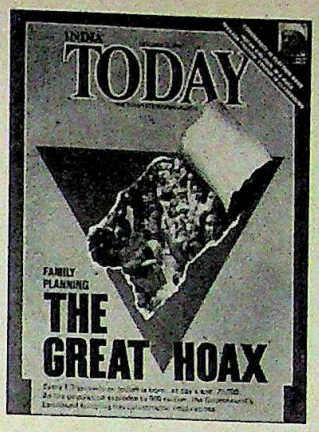

PRICKING THE BUBBLE

It is shocking ("The Great Hoax", October 31) that a government can go to such an extent to pull the wool over the eyes of the people. What we need is tough politicians at the helm of affairs who have the initiative and the courage to push through well-formulated measures, not those with a mere eye on the vote-bank.

Patna — ABHAY CHANDRA

■ Claim 1: The Government is honest with its statistics. The truth: Take it with a pinch of salt. However, with the population of the country burgeoning in the way it is right in front of our eyes, statistics will make no difference in a short while. You can't negate the evidence of millions of eyes.

New Delhi — P. KRISHNAMURTHY

■ Development is the best contraceptive. This is evident from the increasing number of young couples in the cities who are delaying the first child and spacing the second. And certainly, such a realisation has resulted from an awareness that families which restrict the number of children consequently manage to spend a sizeable chunk of their income on items other than food and the absolute basics.

Chandigarh — SUNIL LAHARI

SOME SEOUL SEARCHING

Apropos the cover story "Shame at Seoul" (October 15), the epilogue of the script—the Indian performance at the XXIV Olympiad—was already written before the show of the century began on September 17. But there was a cosmetic change in the script: an injured Usha creating history of sorts by running the trials at the Olympic village. Why was an injured athlete given clearance for the Games? Probably, her coach wanted to complete the shopping he had left incomplete during the Seoul Asiad a couple of years earlier.

Mangalore — GURUDATH K. RAO

■ The battle of Waterloo, it is said, was fought on the playing fields of Eton. In sharp contrast, I have found most school fields empty after school hours in our country. The promised two movies on television will only further diminish the eyesight of our youth and impoverish them of their vigour. To win medals in international competitions, we have to build sports not in the stadia alone but in the villages and towns.

Allahabad — DR J. SHANKER

■ Our prime minister, who seems to have adopted foreign trips as his favourite pastime, should visit some of the nearly 50 medal-winners—including the minuscule Virgin Islands and Antilles—and ask their sports ministers what the secret of their success is. Surely, it is not Bournvita or Boost as flashed by Doordarshan.

Mysore — NITIN

■ Our inability to win medals is no cause for shame. It was entirely due to an alien and unfair system of selecting the winners. There was no reservation for backward classes and the weaker sections, and no preference for those recommended by honourable ministers and their PAs!

New Delhi — RAJIV BAJAJ

THE SEVEN FACTOR

With reference to the article "One step Forward" (October 15), spectrum analysis of white light reveals a combination of seven basic colours. Similarly, energy in nature manifests itself basically in seven forms: potential, kinetic, heat, mechanical, nuclear, electrical and chemical. Also, classical music throughout the world is an excellent combination of *Sapta Swaras*. A harmonious blend of these seven basic swaras produces haunting melodies. The newly-constituted opposition has seven basic constituents: the Jan Morcha, Janata Party, Lok Dal, Telugu Desam, Congress(S), Asom Gana Parishad and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. If their combined might is properly channelised, it can send bright rays of light to disperse the dark political clouds hanging over the country.

Secunderabad — RADHA SUBRAMANIAM

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AS THE BARD SAID

While framing and passing the Defamation Bill in such unseemly haste through the Lok Sabha, our prime minister's thoughts must have been as those of Shakespeare's famous character Macbeth:

If it were done when 'tis done,
then 'twere well
It were done quickly; if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and
catch
With his surcease success; that but this
blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here...
(Act I, scene VII)

Chandigarh — R.S. PATHANIA

THE RIGHT REACTION

This is with reference to your article "Political Scapegoat" (October 31). The ban on Rushdie's book is definitely warranted, since the delicate balance between peace and violence vis-a-vis religious sentiments of the minorities is the crucial issue at stake. The Government cannot permit the entry of a book which is bound to be used by a fanatical minority to whip up communal feelings, which is then certain to result in the massacre of innocent people. The ban is the safest and simplest way of avoiding a communal bloodbath in a country where the slightest provocation such as a short story in a local newspaper is enough to whip up a frenzy of religious sentiment.

Bangalore — USHA & N.S. VENUGOPAL

■ While the ban on *The Satanic Verses* may partly retrieve the fading credibility of a bungling government, the angelic postures of religious outrage do not carry much conviction as the truly religious are beyond offence.

Bangalore — DR G.I. D'SOUZA

LIFTING THE SHADOW

It is incorrect to say in "Out from the Shadows"(October 15) that Maulana Azad was not an important leader of the Khilafat Movement. Gandhiji and the Ali brothers were the most important and influential leaders of the movement, but next to them was Azad. It is also incorrect to say that there are not many references to Azad's participation during the Round Table Conferences and the acrimonious debate over the Communal Award and that the Maulana wielded no influence in the crucial negotiations preceding the transfer of power. His formula had, in fact, been applauded by the members of the British Cabinet Mission.

New Delhi — DR MOHAMMAD HASHIM KIDWAI

NEED FOR EXPOSURE

There is no doubt that there is immense potential for tapping medical electronics technology ("Hi-Tech Gizmos", October 15). However, it would be extremely unwise to protect the indigenous industry by imposing bans on imports, if our experience in the past is to be heeded. It was only a few years ago that import of telecobalt equipment was suspended to facilitate indigenously manufactured equipment (used in the treatment of cancer). The experiment was a disaster and eventually the manufacturing of the item was shut down. It is important to keep local industries on their toes. They must compete with the best in the world both in terms of quality and price.

Bombay — DR NAGRAJ G. HUILGOL

LITTLE SUCCOUR

With reference to "Mob Mayhem" (October 15) I would like to draw your attention to the indifference of the authorities to what happened at the Guru Nanak Devji Engineering College in Bidar. The confidence of some of the students has been shaken to such an extent that they are not prepared to go back at any cost. Makeshift arrangements for an engineering college at Chandigarh or New Delhi should be made by the authorities of Gulbarga University for continuance of the students' studies and compensation paid for the loss of property at the college in Bidar. As usual, politicians have listened patiently to our difficulties but have forgotten all about them as soon as they left the place.

New Delhi — MOHINDER SINGH

■ The happenings in Bidar as reported by you are highly biased and inaccurate. You have ignored making a mention of the forced collections resorted to by Shiv Sena members on the eve of Ganesh Chaturthi and the police inaction that was evident during the arson and looting that followed. Besides, you have only highlighted the eve-teasing and misbehaviour of Sikh students as the root cause. This is far from the truth and happens to be a one-sided report.

Chandigarh — D.B. SINGH

MAROING US SLANG

The article on Indian college campus slang ("Zapping up the Ulti Lingo", September 30) came as a pleasant surprise. Most of the slang floating around Indian campuses has undoubtedly been borrowed from American slang. The irony is that American slang seems less colourful on its own. But Indian students in America have also added a few words to their lingo to label different ethnic groups. A black person is a *Kallu*, a white person is a *gora* and an oriental a *chapta*.

Houston University, US — NAGAPPA

■ You *banaoed* a fit scene man! *Hajaar* janata pored over your piece. But here's some more. When one wants to give up or forget something, it's *Matiyas* in Bihar or ditchax at IIM Bangalore. In IIT Kanpur, the superlatives run as follows: better, quite-the-better and much-e-better (true non-grammarian's delight!). Engineering knowledge has its way of percolating through otherwise *fatru* heads. A small quantity is delta (from Calculus), an even smaller quantity is delta squared. Brains, topper-types and do-gooders are *bakaits* while in other places they are *baaps* and *daads* or classified as cats. Superlatives of this variety are Total Cool Cats (later converted to *Sampoorna Sheetal Billis*). And when a prof is generous enough to let you pass, you say *daana diya hai*.

IIM Bangalore — VENKY

DIFFERENT VIEW

Regarding your story on the film *The Deceivers* ("A Breakneck Thriller", August 15) based on John Master's famous novel on the suppression of *Thugee* in the 1820s a few incorrect interpretations appear in the review—perhaps as a result of the book not being consulted when reviewing the film. *Thugee* was not the term used to describe the men who practised this profession, they were called 'thugs'. Also, *The Deceivers* was not written at the comic book level of *Around the World in Eighty Days* or the Indiana Jones series. And no irony was intended by the author in naming his hero William Savage. Actually, the first of the Savage clan to be introduced was Rodney in Master's *Bhowani Junction* set in the '40s. Although Merchant may have transformed this story into a visual extravaganza, *The Deceivers* was not conceived as a curry eastern like *The Far Pavilions*.

Roorkee — MAJOR A.K. SRIVASTAVA

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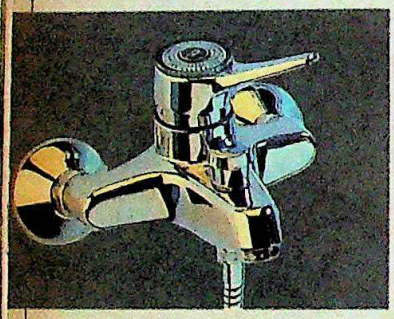

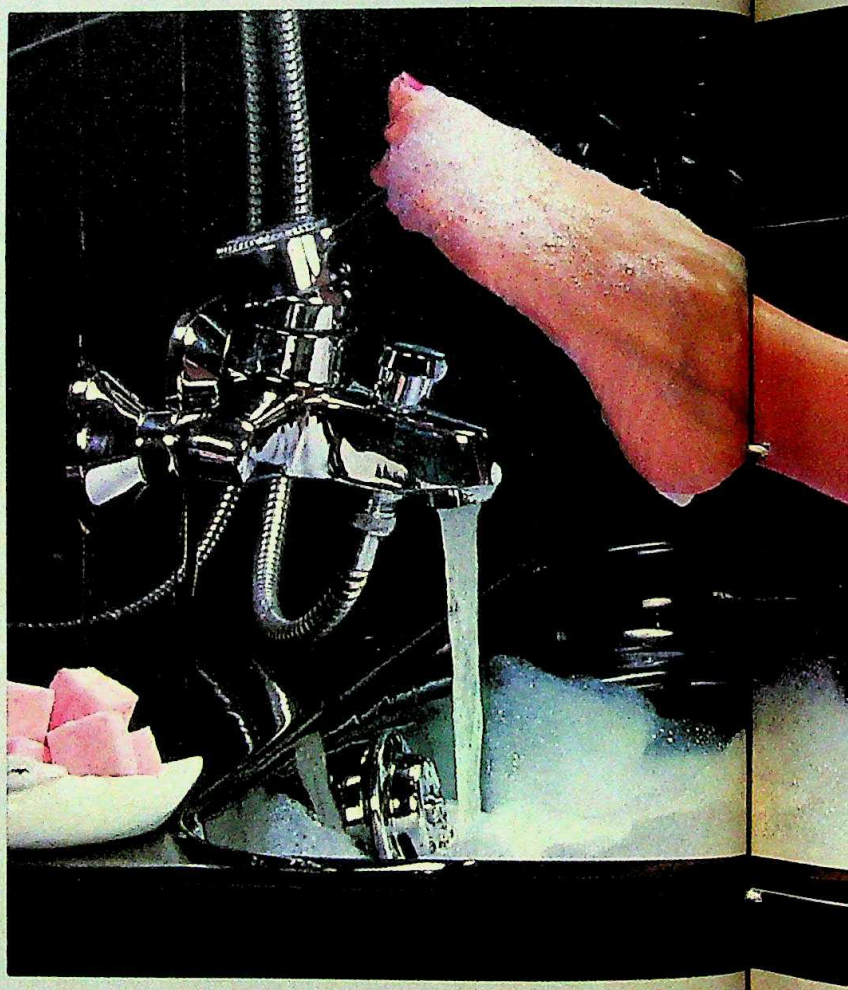

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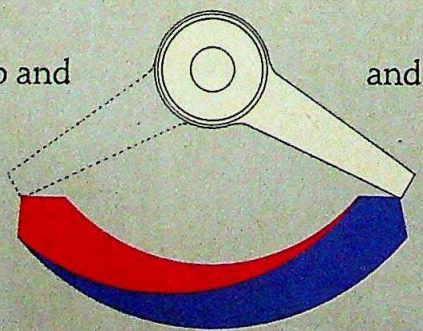

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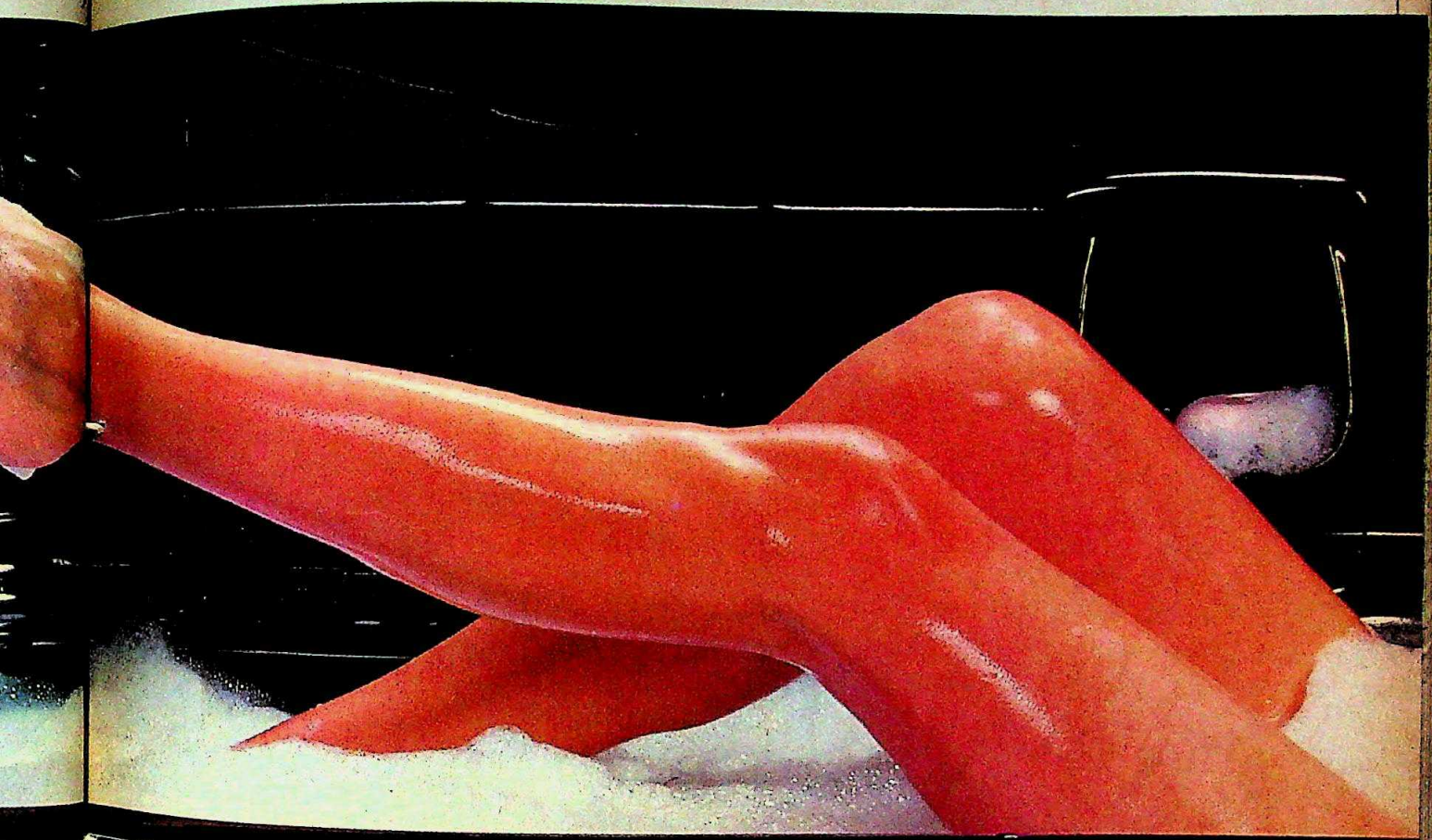

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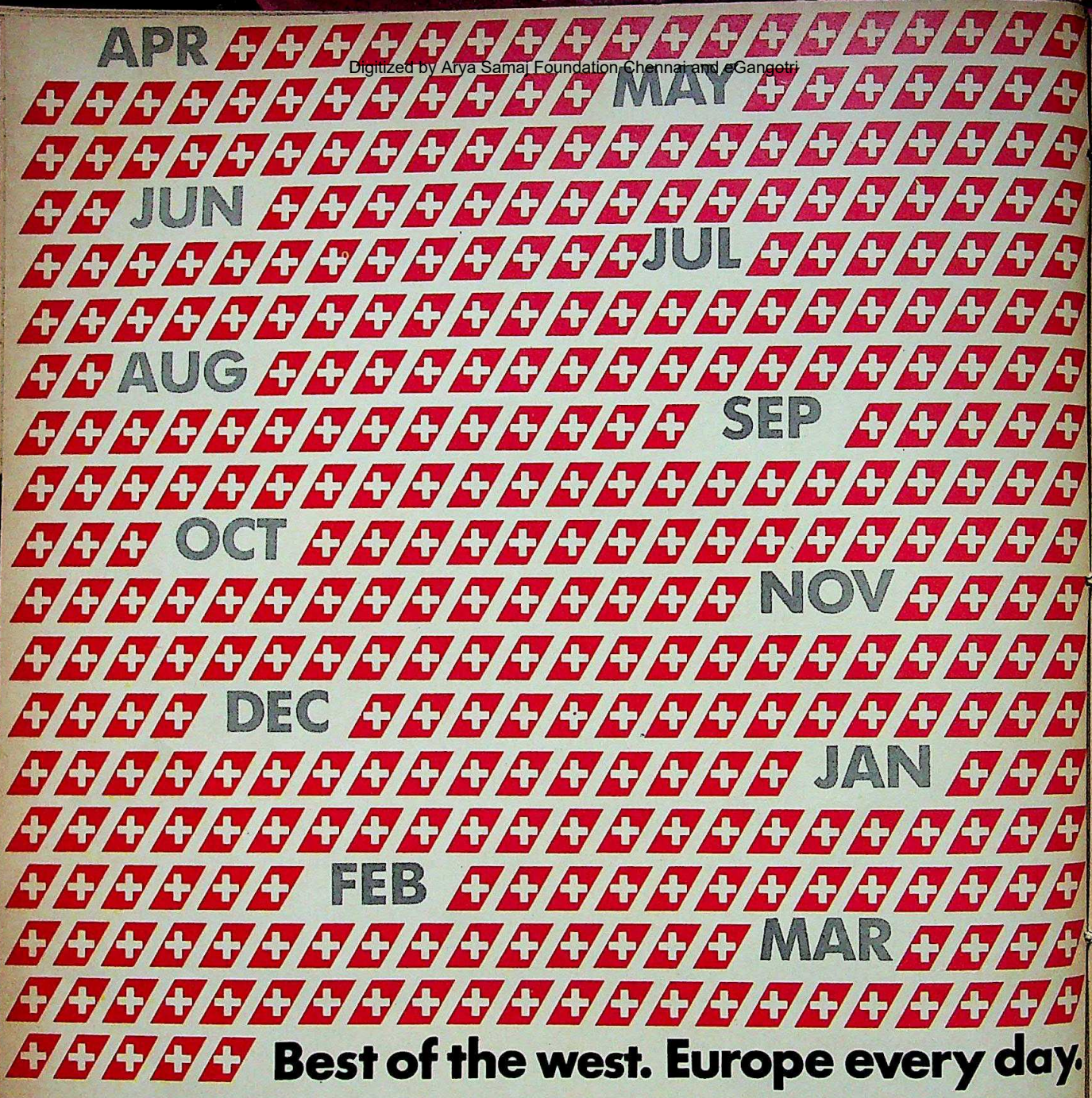

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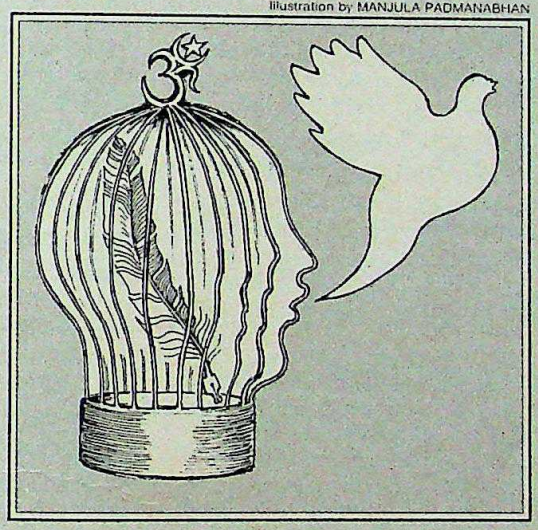
Hypersensitive Reactions

THE panic-stricken manner in which the Government decided to ban Salman Rushdie's latest novel *The Satanic Verses*, and Martin Scorcese's new film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, reveals three things: the weakness of an authority willing to capitulate before the strident demands of particular faiths and self-styled moral guardians; a cavalier disregard for differing points of view; and India's hypersensitive reaction to viewpoints, especially from the West.

The case supporting the bans has a fairly respectable pedigree: it is not only Syed Shahabuddin who feels that Salman Rushdie's novel should be banned. Other eminent critics, writers, newspaper editors, and some lawyers, not all of them Muslim, genuinely believe that the country's communal cauldron is so heated, that allowing a few "elite" Indians the freedom to wallow in the religio-mystical fantasies in the finest tradition of literature is too costly a gamble.

Illustration by MANJULA PADMANABHAN



But as an American revolutionary said: If a society is willing to sacrifice precious liberty for temporary safety, it deserves neither liberty nor safety. Communal disharmony, sensitive relations between two religions, and a charged atmosphere are the collective albatross of India's reality. But instead of punishing those who vitiate the atmosphere in the country, India chooses to silence those who see the reality differently.

More pernicious is the growing trend of mob censorship: In Delhi, Manoj Kumar had to change the title of his film from *Kalyug Ki Ramayan* to *Kalyug Aur ?* to appease a Hindu fundamentalist group. In Bombay, the Hindu Suraksha Sena publicly humiliated the author and director of *Shakespeare Ki Ramlila* because the Sena felt the play insulted Rama and Sita. All over India, fundamentalist groups wanted Doordarshan to stop screening *Tamas*. (In a rare act of courage, the Government did not give in). The Maharashtra Government found the phantom-like Shiv Sena demanding the expunction of the appendix of a state-published edition of collected works of Babasaheb Ambedkar because the writing denigrated Hindu gods. Down south, *Kristhuvinte Araam Thirumurivu* (the sixth sacred wound of Christ, based on the same Nikos Kazantzakis novel from which Martin Scorcese drew inspiration for his banned film) ran into trouble.

These are usually official trade-offs to appease political vote-banks. And in every case, those seeking the ban have neither seen the film nor read the book. In a pluralistic, multi-everything society like India, communal tension is the Scylla and lack of freedom the Charybdis—two dangers of such a kind that to avoid one vastly increases the risk from the other. The choice is ours. And the longer the country continues to make security-blanket choices, the longer it postpones its graduation into a responsible democracy capable of taking the communal bull by the horns.

The ban reinforces a deeper Indian trait: the country professes to be an open society, promotes the concept of self-criticism as well as aggressive excoriation of things and ways foreign, yet takes petulant umbrage when admonished or judged by outsiders. Nirad Chowdhury, V.S. Naipaul, Mark Tully and BBC television crews, and western newspapers have all witnessed this rough face of Indian democracy.

Press officials in Indian embassies work overtime making little clippings of news and opinion articles about India and make sanctimonious and injured official protests to the host governments. In Britain, the foreign office has to gently remind the Indian mission that Britain is a democracy, and the state has no control over individual viewpoints. A disparaging article about India which appeared recently in a Finnish newspaper prompted a Bombay daily to write a stinging editorial criticising the paper, denounce the writer as racist, and demand that the Indian Government lodge a formal protest with the Finns.

For foreign correspondents, permission to photograph a decrepit bridge could require the intervention of no less a person than a Gopi Arora. Foreign film makers wanting to make films in India, too, find the sticky-fingered bureaucracy vetting the script with a fine comb. Merchant-Ivory had that problem when they filmed *The Deceivers* in Rajasthan. And the film maker of *La Nuit Bengalee* would certainly think twice before tackling India as a subject. Television crews, which have to come to India more often, find it even harder. Not everyone is an Attenborough with a Rani Dube in tow to ride roughshod over the bureaucracy, and the TV crews find that if they are allowed to film in India, it is with severe restrictions, and then, should the final product show India in bad light, all hell breaks loose: the BBC film on the Taj Mahal Hotel, which made a laughing-stock of Bombay's elite, did not make Indian officialdom laugh. Yet, for every Catherine Mayo, there is a Richard Lannoy, for every Naipaul, an A.L. Basham.

By its censorious actions the Government has confiscated the right of its people to interpret their own tradition, and chosen to surrender to authoritarian defenders of the faith. In so doing, the Government has judged its citizens as children incapable of deciding whether they should be able to read books or to see films on their own. The logical question that emerges from this paternalistic view is that if Indians are not mature enough to read books or see films then are they mature enough to decide who should govern them? Perhaps this too will be decided by the censors of South Block.

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PRESSMAN

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The Success of Failure

● In the never-ending redistribution of power in Rajiv Gandhi's Congress(I), nothing appears to succeed like failure. There has now emerged a noticeable new troika playing the vaudeville of power. It comprises the forever bested Ghulam Nabi Azad, Sitaram

Kesari and Oscar Fernandes. They have chalked up an enviable record of failures in states to which they were assigned as political trouble-shooters or vote-catchers—Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh to name just a few. But still, the three are being rewarded with seats on every new steering committee conceived by the party organisation.

These range from bodies to mark the October 31 Congress celebrations and Rajiv Gandhi's birthday, to ostensibly more weighty ones on Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and the non-Congress(I) states. Meanwhile, those partymen who have succeeded (and thus failed) are naturally irked about being deprived of their share of the power and the glory. The triumvirate is being sarcastically referred to as the Muslim-Bania-Christian axis. But while sticks and stones may break bones...the committee-happy troika is simply too busy hopping from steering room to steering room, preparing to unleash a fresh flood of disasters on the party.

PR in the Raw

● Finally our cloak-and-dagger outfits have woken to an ethnic truth: in India it isn't actual performance that is important, but that which is projected. The key to the game is PR. Our desi KGBs, the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing and their nondescript clones have suddenly embarked on a major media wooing exercise. They are receiving increased funding for the purpose, and are directing it in a direction where they all maintain cells: Punjab.

Our James Bonds instead of penetrating devious terrorist networks are spending their time wooing reporters. Others back home in Delhi have been approaching bewildered journalists with requests for recruitment tips. The secret service boys, who've

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN

done an abysmal job of information gathering in Punjab in the last seven years, have picked up one invaluable nugget of strategy from their political overlords—the planting of stories. And in a manner behoving their masters—and the grandmaster of them all—the scribes are urged to pen the plants on the plea that it's all 'in the national interest'.

Five-Star Bureaucrats

● The one thing that any person can easily identify this poor, starving country with is government ostentation. Whether the people have bread or no bread, the civil

servants must definitely eat cake.

The Ministry of Child Development—always starved for funds—deliberated on its tasks recently by throwing a huge do in one of Delhi's five-star hotels. Some of those who participated in this generous exercise said the figure of the revellers must have certainly exceeded a hundred.

Of course, in the civil servant culture of the five-star spaceworld too there must be some champions. Though the competition is doubtless stiff, one serious contender must most certainly be Aftab Seth, India's former consul general in Karachi. The boisterous and flamboyant Seth, now chief spokesman in the Ministry of External Affairs is reckoned a big spender, regularly throwing bashes at glitzy places. While a certain amount of partying at government expense such as entertaining foreign journalists is a legitimate function of that office, his most recent do for some 50 guests comprised a whole bunch of fellow bureaucrats from various services.

Defunct Planning

● Operation Brass Tacks was not the only imbroglio the oh-so-flamboyant General Krishnaswamy Sundarji left to be unravelled. There were several mini-disasters left in the wake of the pistolero general, one of which, the 'defence planning staff', has become the laughing-stock of South Block.

The hi-tech general from the Mahar Regiment had conceived of the department as an apex planning body to coordinate strategy of the army, air force and navy. It could not even coordinate intra-office politics and was so undermined that the first chairman of the body, Lt-General B.C. Nanda, could not even find himself proper office space.

The department had faced stiff opposition because it was

likely to supersede several existing bodies, but Sundarji had insisted on going ahead with it. Now with his era over, the reactionaries have been able to scuttle the department for all practical purposes. At least enough for it to be now known in South Block circles as, the 'defunct planning staff'.

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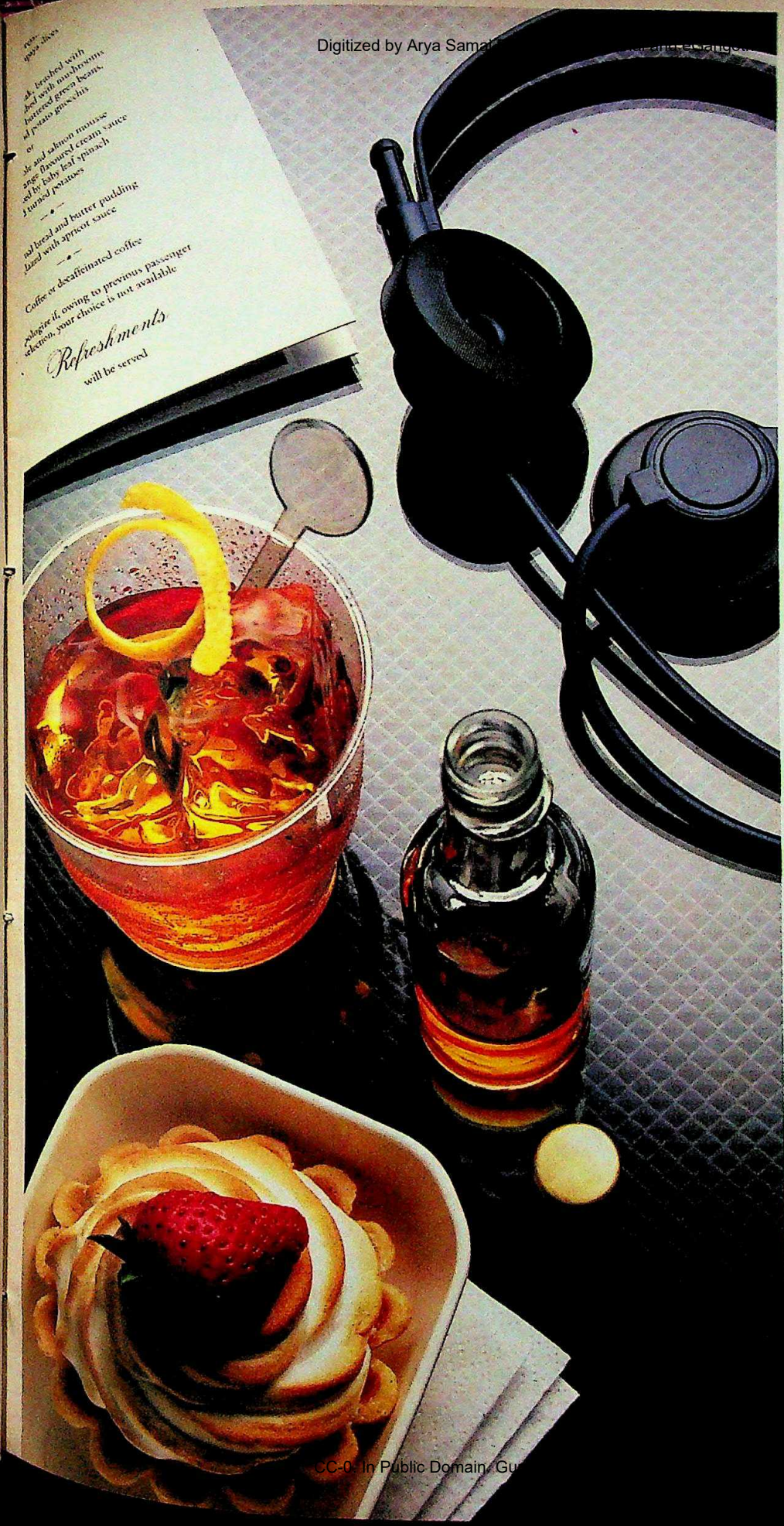

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said my wife.
"But ..." I said
"After all we don't construct a house every Sunday", She said.

"But ..." I said.
"Nothing doing" she said.

"Get Super JK Cement, d'you hear?" She said storming out of the room.

"Yes dear!" I said.

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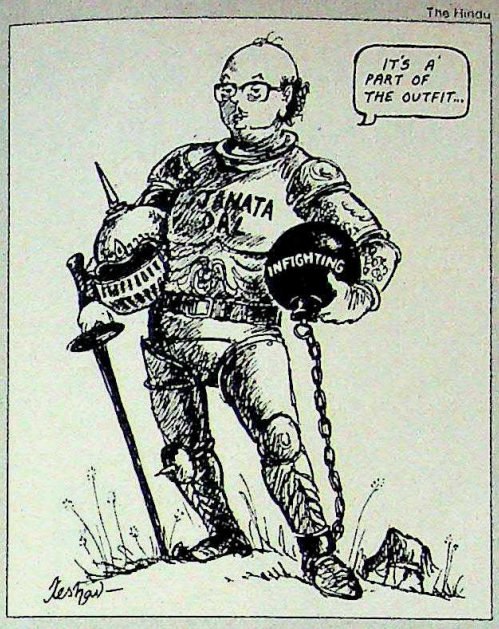

• *The (Opposition) unity efforts have led to so much wrangling, mud-slinging and backbiting, that it might be an advantage for the Congress(I) if a snap poll is announced now.*

■ L.K. ADVANI in *The Telegraph*

• *You can't learn your language, you can't pray in your mosque, you can't bury your dead. It is a case of psychological siege.*

■ SYED SHAHABUDDIN in *The Sunday Observer*

• *It's time to go to war. If he (Rajiv Gandhi) thinks he is going to have a quiet life, he has a think coming.*

■ SALMAN RUSHDIE quoted in *The Sunday Observer*

• *Had I used my father's contacts, I would have been a bigger businessman today.*

■ CHANDAN BASU, West Bengal chief minister's son, in *Sunday*

• *Bombay is like a Menaka to which many a Vishwamitra have fallen prey.*

■ VASANT SATHE, Union energy minister, on Bombay becoming over-congested, in *The Times of India*

• *I pay no attention to the US attitude to India or the Indian attitude to the US. That's something that affects about half a dozen bureaucrats on both sides.*

■ J.K. GALBRAITH, American economist, in *Business India*

• *In my opinion, there was never glasnost on TV—there was only a whiff of air moving towards glasnost.*

■ RAMESH SHARMA, noted film maker, in *Sunday*

• *Our boys took their chances and you did not and that was the difference between the two sides.*

■ ISLAHUDDIN, Pakistan coach, after his side won the last Olympics' hockey classification match against India, in *Sportsweek*

• *Why can't they (film stars).... turn to politics if they so wish? No one questions a lawyer or an electrician if he dabbles in politics.*

■ RAJ BABBAR in *Star & Style*

• *I'll never act in films after my marriage. I'll be a faithful wife and mother of children.*

■ SRIDEVI in *Sunday Mail*

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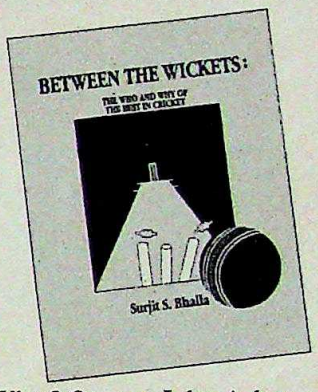

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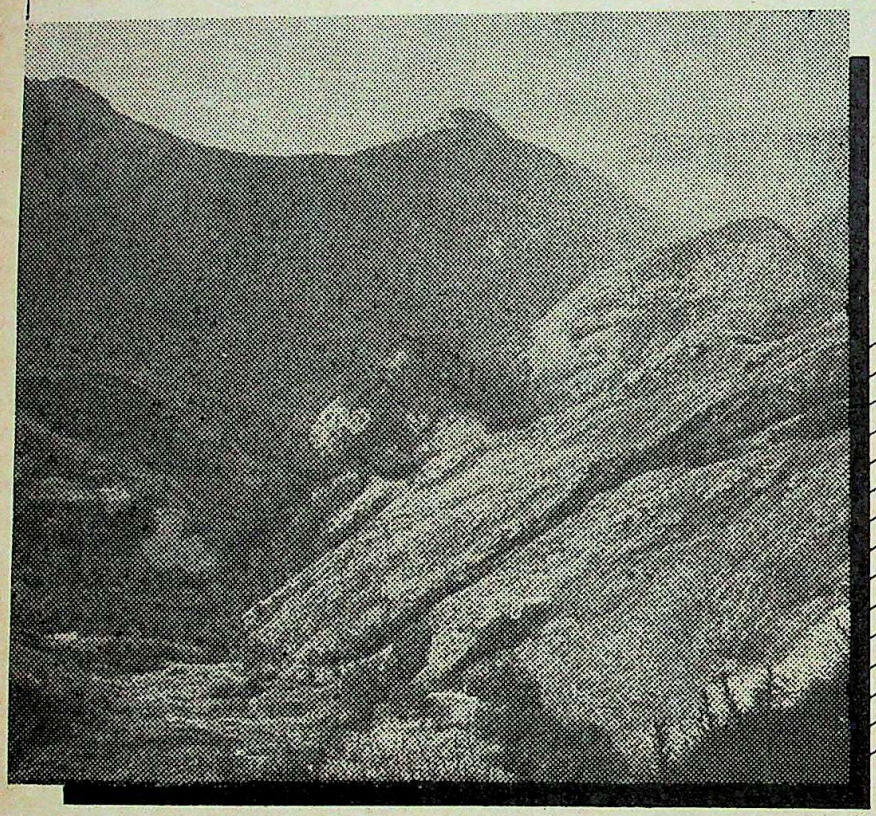

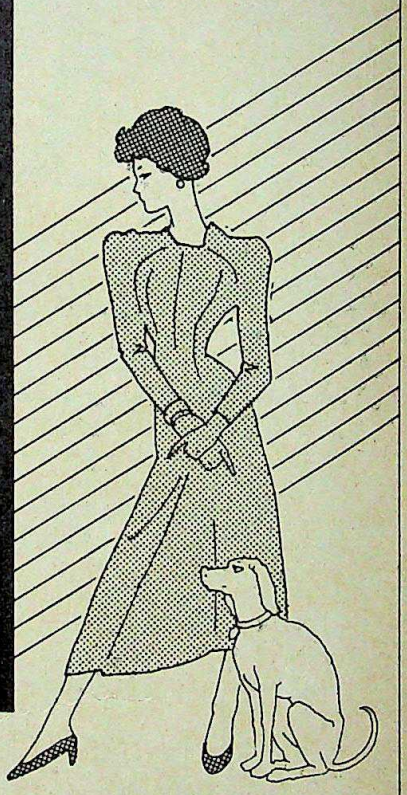

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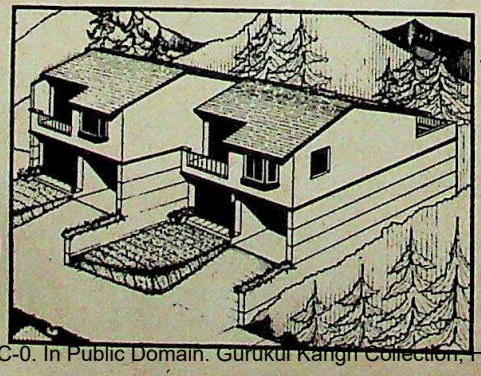

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JOKES AND ROBBERS

■ Audacity, audacity and more audacity were prescriptions for revolution. The same ingredients help to make a bank robbery successful. Two young men burst into the Bank of Maharashtra in Bangalore all set to empty the bank vaults. They carried a gun, a wicked looking knife that threatened to disembowel anyone who felt too protective about the Government exchequer, and, a bit unusually for bank robbers—a bomb.

With the depredations of Janardhan Poojari fresh in their minds, no one objected when the two grabbed Rs 1 lakh, borrowed an employee's motorbike and vanished around the corner. Soon afterwards, a note was found. It said: "It is funny. It's not a bomb, it's an ashtray. It's not a gun, it's a toy gun. It's not a knife, you can get it at any handicraft centre. Yours, three jokers."

But remember, only two robbers entered the bank. So, who was the third joker: a fifth columnist?

CREDIT TERMS

■ People in Punjab have long since given up all hope of seeing an end to terrorist killings. First it was the Rajiv-Longowal accord which held out hopes of a solution. Longowal was killed, and the clauses of the accord never implemented. Hopes then shifted to Surjit Singh Barnala. But terrorist killings only increased. The dismissal of Barnala and President's rule made no difference either. The recent visit of the prime minister himself was so much water down the Sutlej.

But it is a shopkeeper in distant Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh who has best expressed the sheer hopelessness of all efforts to solve the Punjab problem. "No credit," says a board in his shop, "until the Punjab problem is solved." And if the Union Government's successes in Punjab so far are anything to go by, it's unlikely that anyone is ever going to pester our shopkeeper.

SPYCATCHERS

■ A Delhi journalist parked his scooter outside the diplomatic mission of a country until recently at war and went in to meet an official. That was a year ago. Recently, he was contacted by a leading Indian intelligence agency. You see, the intelligence men explained apologetically, the man who had noted the scooter's number a year earlier had gone on leave. So could he help by providing any information about the mission?

No, the journalist said, he couldn't. However, he added mischievously, he knew someone who might be of help—and provided the address of a friend. That evening the spooks did something cute. Much to the surprise of the journalist's friend, they landed up at his house—unannounced—with sweets for his child. How did the conversation proceed, you'll ask. But enough! We must draw the curtain somewhere.

EASY RIDERS

■ They had tried pleas and petitions but when nothing improved the punctuality of the local bus service, the residents of a Thane housing colony decided to take matters into their own hands.

When the next bus limbered along, as usual late by the better part of an hour, they rushed on to the road, just in case the driver decided to give the stop a miss. Certainly, the driver realised quickly, this was not the usual crowd of patient passengers who regarded late buses as acts of God. About turn, they ordered, and the driver obeyed hurriedly for this crowd was not going to take no for an answer. So back it was to the route controller's office and by the time the harried passengers had done with their rampage, it looked as if a bus had passed through the office. Need it be added as a footnote that the bus service is now uncharacteristically punctual.

BLUNDERING HAND

■ The manner in which Monisha Verma dealt with the Delhi Transport Corporation employees who tried to paw her has inspired others. One middle-aged woman travelling in a crowded bus knew it was her day of glory when she saw a hand sneaking in pickpocket fashion towards the trouser pocket of a young man nearby.

Deciding to catch the thief red-handed, she waited until the fingers closed around the purse. Then, with a bloodcurdling shout, she grabbed the hand with all her strength, not inconsiderable—if the yell of pain that greeted her was any evidence. Only one fact stood between the woman and the reams of newspaper fame that ought to have been hers by right. The owner of the hand also owned the purse. And having recovered from the shock, he said: "Thanks for saving my purse. Now will you let me save my hand?"

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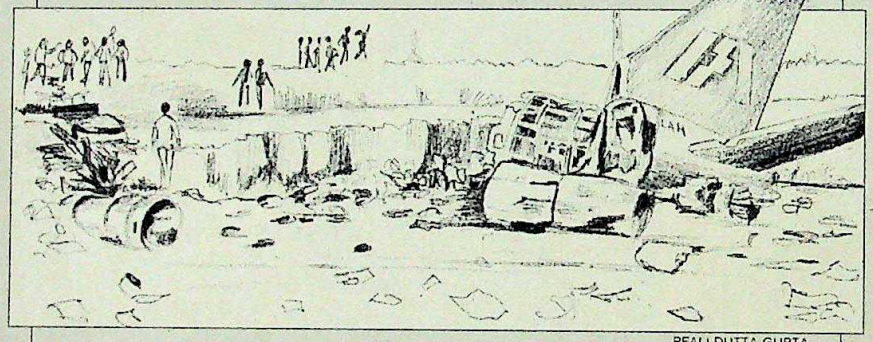
Din of Disasters

THE twisted wreckage of human lives turned the fortnight that was into a detritus of disaster. It was not, in the end, the terrible toll in the twin air tragedies that sanctioned the most sorrow but the fact that so many had to die at all. Even before the experts have pronounced their findings, the verdict is already out: Indian skies are no longer as safe as everybody believed.

The crashes themselves are symptomatic of a national malaise—the air of complacency that stultifies government-owned undertakings. But to allow that situation to develop in Indian civil aviation, when thousands of innocent lives are at stake each day, is nothing short of criminal negligence.

However belated it may be—and however cruel to the memory of those who died—the crashes have succeeded in restoring an air of reality. The shock—and the scandal—are certain to ensure that safety strictures are followed more closely than before. But the painful truth is that without the acceptance of responsibility, it will not be long before Indian Airlines and Vayudoot book return passage to their derelict ways.

However cruel to the memory of those who died, the crashes have restored an air of reality.



PEALI DUTTA GUPTA

The real tragedy is that most Indians accept substandard service and unsafe air services rather than fight for what is theirs by right.

Yet, the blame does not lie with irresponsible airline managements alone. It is equally shared by the millions who use that service and accept the flaws without protest. More tragic than the crashes themselves is the crucial flaw in the Indian character—that lets a majority of Indians accept substandard service and unsafe air services rather than fight for what is theirs by right.

It is sadly ironic that millions of poor and illiterate peasants can feel strongly enough about their rights to travel miles and lay siege to Delhi—and face the consequences of that action—rather than sit back and simmer in discontent and disregard. Yet, on crucial issues that affect the lives of so many, the people who are more privileged and should be showing the way are content to let incompetence and falsity govern their lives.

Rajiv Gandhi tours the country, visits scenes of death and devastation, and pledges huge amounts of money that is not there for the giving. On its Sri Lanka policy, India is hurtling towards what looks like its biggest foreign policy disaster in 41 years. Come December, Sri Lanka will elect a new president. Both candidates have pledged to ask the Indian Peace Keeping Force to quit the island. The anti-Indian sentiments among the populace alone will ensure that promise is kept. Yet, rather than save face—and the needless lives of Indian soldiers—South Block persists in ramming through an accord that is clearly destined for the dustbin of history.

In Haryana, we now have the incredible sight of the two sons of Chief Minister Devi Lal engaged in a bitter battle for succession—as if the chair were theirs by right, regardless of merit or public acceptance. It is, again, that self-same flaw in the Indian psyche—the placid acceptance of dynastic rule that was supposedly abolished when Independence arrived.

There was a reminder of that on October 31, when Rajiv addressed the biggest-ever collection of political humanity at Delhi's Boat Club. Sycophancy and sophistry is the battery that will charge the Congress(I) for the coming elections. But in true dynastic tradition, not a tear was shed for the woman in whose honour the event was held—the late Indira Gandhi.

—DILIP BOBB

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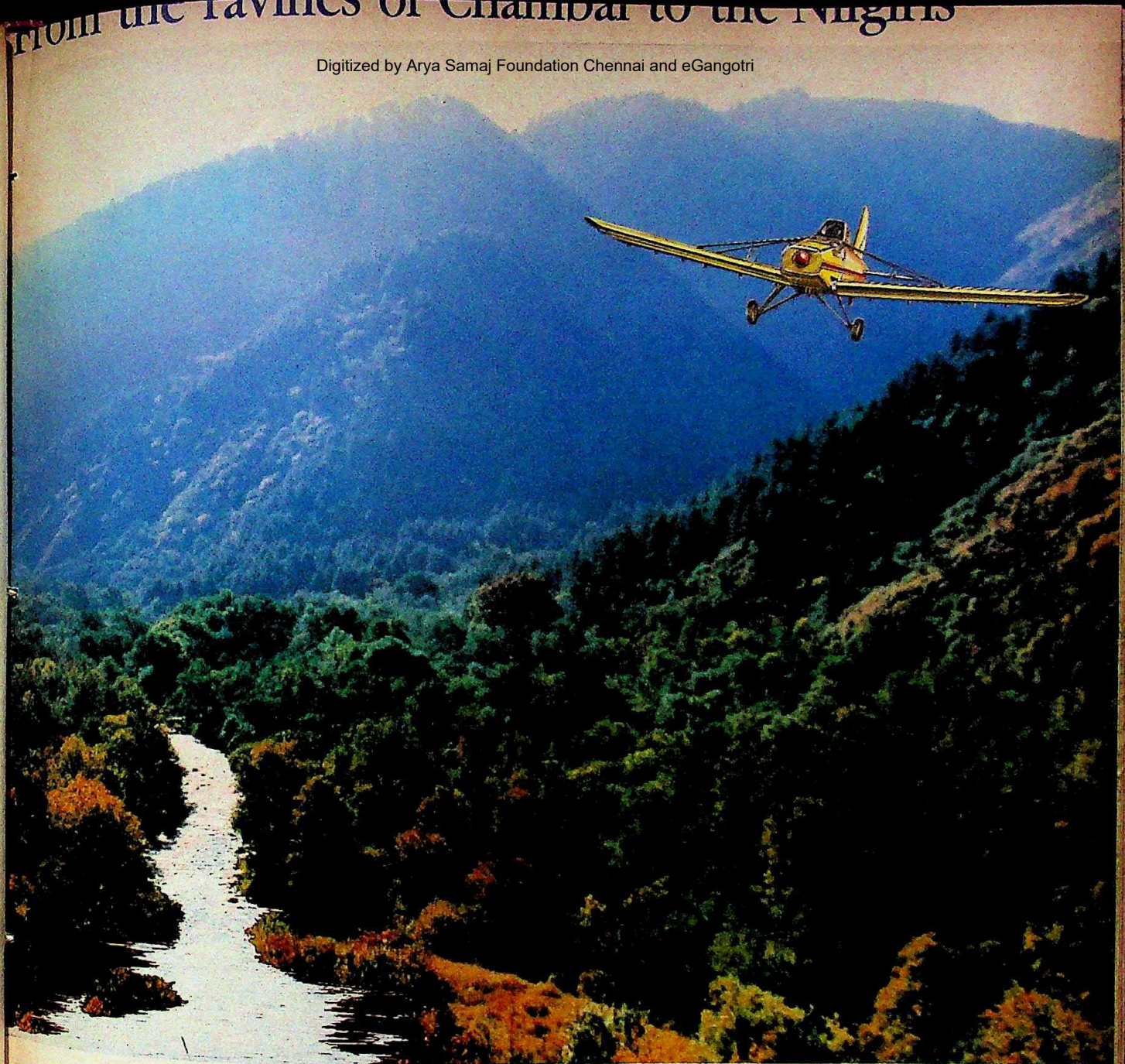

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PAKISTAN ELECTIONS

Tasting Democracy

As Pakistan gears up for only the third and most crucial elections of its history, Benazir is raring to reclaim her father's legacy. Democracy, it would appear, is finally at hand. But, in Pakistan where religion and army make for an explosive mix, serious doubts continue to persist. Not only about the outcome of the poll, but also whether they will be held at all.

STREET corners in Pakistan are once again aflutter with flags—the green, black and red standard-bearer of the People's Party, and the old Muslim League flag of the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA)—as, for only the third time in the nation's 41-year history, political parties limber up to participate in a general election, which augurs to radically alter the political face of Pakistan.

But even as Benazir Bhutto was planning to make a spectacular entry into Punjab from her home region of Sind, doubts were still being voiced about the elections being held as scheduled on November 16. The uncertainty was not just a reflection of the fact that Pakistan is trying to hesitantly re-emerge as a democracy after 11 years of authoritarian rule. It also reflected real fears that opponents of democratisation within the ruling elite might engineer events to ensure the elections are called off.

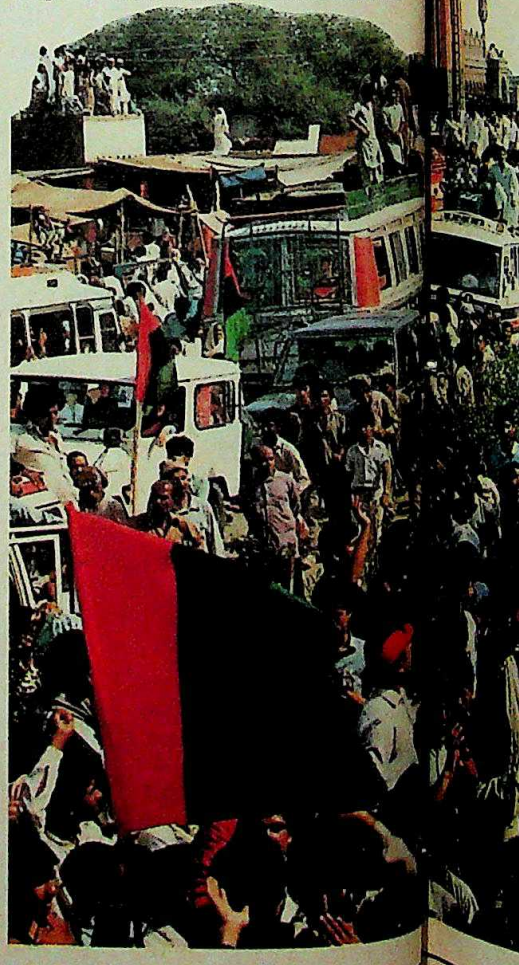
However, both the judiciary, which is supervising an election for the first time in the subcontinent, and the all-powerful Pakistan Army seemed firmly committed to the poll. Justice S.A. Nusrat, the chief election commissioner, repeatedly emphasised the elaborate arrangements being made to guarantee its fairness. More importantly, Pakistan's new army chief, General Mirza Aslam Beg, addressed soldiers throughout the country on the same theme—the need for a return to democratic rule. "The judiciary and the armed forces played a positive role in creating the political environment for free and fair elections," he told men of the Punjab Regiment. "This now places a heavy responsibility on the political leadership that it realises its obligations, helps make the exercise a big success, and rids the country of the prevailing crises."

In fact, the army is widely believed to have played a role in bringing about a lightning political coalition of the right, thus converting the November 16 poll into, essentially, a contest between two main political groupings. Till last month, the ruling Pakistan Muslim League was split into two bitterly feuding factions led by former prime minister Mohammad Khan Junejo and Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif. Overnight, however, the two factions came together in Lahore to transform the nine-party rightist coalition, the Islamic Democratic Alliance into a powerful challenger to Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

This shotgun unity pointed to the army's anxiety over a possible PPP sweep of the polls. Though publicly the Pakistan Army maintains a non-political and neutral image, doubts persist about whether a section of senior officers will accept the return of a Bhutto to power. It is true, with the death of Zia-ul-Haq, the main focus of the PPP's desire to avenge Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's execution has disappeared. But the presence of hundreds of PPP workers, jailed and tortured after the 1977 army coup, creates the possibility of strong pressures on the party leadership, after an electoral victory, for making the army accountable for past crimes.

It is for this reason that PPP leaders keep emphasising that the party no longer has a quarrel with the nation's armed forces. "The Pakistan Army is an army built by the Pakistani people," says Benazir Bhutto. "We have never been against the army. It is the use of the army for political repression, which General Zia indulged in, which we've been against."

Benazir has gone a step further in assuaging the army's apprehensions by giving national assembly tickets not only to retired service officers like Air Marshal Nur Khan, but also to Rana Naeem Mehmood, Zia's minister of state for defence, who defected to the PPP along with four other former federal ministers. One of the PPP's star candidates, of course, is its secretary-general, the retired General Tikka Khan who at 73 is contesting his first election from a Rawalpindi constituency. "We have assured the armed forces



Benazir and PPP supporters in Lahore: tough battle

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that we're not going for revenge," asserts Tikka Khan, who was army chief under Bhutto. "We will win by a big majority, and we will look after the armed forces."

As Tikka Khan launched his campaign last fortnight, with election posters proclaiming him "the people's general", the possibility seemed real that public resentment of Zia's rule might build up into a groundswell of support for the PPP. Twenty-five-year-old Tariq Mehmood Jehangiri held up his right hand to reveal a missing thumb and two fingers—lost when he was tortured at Lahore Fort after being arrested during a student demonstration at Rawalpindi in 1981. "There are thousands like me who were jailed and tortured," he said. "For the first time now there is hope that the dark night will end."

If the November 16 poll were to become a referendum on the seamier side of Zia's long, autocratic rule, it could well result in a landslide for the PPP. Said Aitzaz Ahsan, the 43-year-old lawyer and close adviser of Benazir: "The general election is the first opportunity for the victims of Zia's rule to establish that whatever was done to them in the last 11 years was illegitimate. It is a vindication of their long struggle."

As the campaigning started, the dilemma facing 35-year-old Benazir became apparent: to assure the ruling elite that a return to power by the PPP will not mean a return to the radical politics of the '70s; and to respond to the strong anti-status quo aspirations of the people, especially the poor and the working class, who still look back to the '70s as a golden period in Pakistani history. "It was under Mr Bhutto that we got additional rooms, piped gas and other amenities in the railway workers colony," proclaimed Malik Abdur Rashid, an engine-driver from Rawalpindi. "We got absolutely nothing under Zia."

But the PPP manifesto for the November 16 poll contains few of the radical promises made by the party under Zulfikar Bhutto. In fact, there is not much to distinguish the PPP manifesto from that of its opponents. It categorically rules out nationalisation of industries, reasserts Pakistan's historic ties with the United States, remains hazy about the fact that nearly 60 per cent of the country's budget is devoted to military expenditure, and promises "to uphold the high ideals of Islam". It does promise to implement Bhutto's abortive land reform programme, but with the list of party candidates to the 207-member national assembly (besides 10 reserved seats for minorities and 20 seats for women) dominated by landlords, the fate of the 1977 land legislation continues to be in doubt.

One of the few radical promises made by the PPP is the repeal of all discriminatory laws against women. But the party will need a strong mandate before it can attempt that. "Benazir is also under compulsion to be Islamic," asserts a top leader of the Jammat-e-Islami which is providing

ASHRAF NAGI

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the organisational muscle to the IDA electoral campaign. "If she changes Islamic laws, the whole nation will stand up against the PPP like in 1977." But Ahsan expresses hope when he exults: "We are going to sweep the polls. It is going to be a verdict against fundamentalism, against rule by Mullahs."

The PPP, however, entered the election campaign with a virtual rebellion building on its left flank. Soon after the list of national assembly candidates was announced, Dr Mubashir Hassan, Bhutto's finance minister and former secretary-general of the party, declared, "Our party has been hijacked once again (a reference to the 1977 poll when a majority of PPP tickets were given to landlords). Today we are again being asked to vote for landlords, smugglers, goonda patrons, ministers and advisers of Zia."

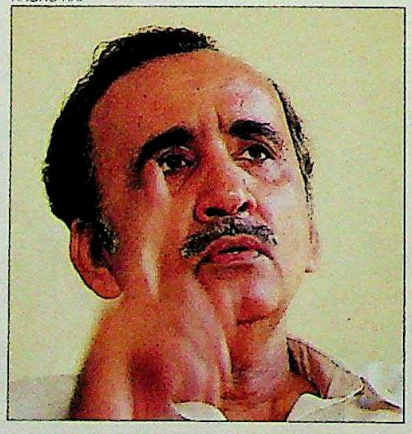
THOUGH PUBLICLY THE ARMY MAINTAINS A NON-POLITICAL AND NEUTRAL IMAGE, DOUBTS PERSIST ABOUT WHETHER A SECTION OF SENIOR OFFICERS WILL ACCEPT THE RETURN OF A BHUTTO TO POWER.

The situation on the ground is even more serious. In one of Benazir's own constituencies—she is contesting from Lahore, Karachi and her hometown Larkana—four PPP workers went on hunger strike to protest the denial of a Lahore provincial assembly ticket to a local trade unionist, Shahida Jabeen. The fasting workers had spent several years in jail after the 1977 coup, and one of them was even shot in the thigh when lakhs had turned out to welcome Benazir to Lahore in 1986. Jabeen said: "The question is not which party to vote for, but who is the candidate. The PPP has been hijacked by capitalists and landlords." Jabeen was particularly incensed by the fact that even those parliamentarians from Zia's party-less national assembly who had signed the infamous 8th Amendment—removing several actions of the previous government, including Bhutto's execution, from the purview of the courts—were given tickets by the PPP.

In fact, the class profile of the next national assembly is unlikely to be very different from the last, which was so unceremoniously dismissed by Zia on May 29. Both the PPP and the IDA are banking heavily on the traditional vote gatherers—the landlords—in the hope of capturing power. A study of the last assembly reveals that 157 members were landlords as compared to 18 urban professionals. The return of party-based elections has made no difference to the type of contestants in the fray—both sides have turned to the old power-brokers to get the voters into the polling booths.

RAGHU RAI

RAGHU RAI



Junejo: spirited challenge

The IDA, meantime, appears even more of a house divided. The alliance was fashioned in a hurry for fear of an outright PPP victory. In fact, the Junejo and Nawaz Sharif factions of the Muslim League united soon after Junejo had formed his own three-party Pakistan People's Alliance (PPA) with retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan's Tehrik-e-Istiqlal (TI) party and the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan (JUP). Junejo then had to jettison the TI and the JUP with ticket distribution becoming an impossible exercise. He also had to abandon his long-standing demand that the caretaker government of Nawaz Sharif in Punjab be dismissed to ensure a fair poll on November 16.

But resentment began to surface soon after the announcement of IDA nominations for the provincial assembly elections. The revolt began first in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) led by former chief minister Arbab Jehangir. Jehangir was given only a national assembly ticket, denying him the possible chief ministership of NWFP after the provincial poll. Problems regarding seat distribution also surfaced in Baluchistan and Punjab, ensuring the presence of several strong rebel candidates in the field.

The entire objectives of the alliance seem in peril. In the 1970 elections, which were not considered rigged like the 1977 poll, the PPP had won 70 per cent of the seats in what was then West Pakistan with just 33 per cent of vote. At the time the presence of three Muslim League factions and three other Muslim religious parties had divided the rightist vote. In the national assembly today, Punjab has 115 seats, Sind 46, NWFP 26 and Baluchistan 11, besides eight from the tribal areas and one from the capital, Islamabad. In Punjab, NWFP and Baluchistan the ruling and Junejo factions of the Muslim League are headed for a confrontation at the hustings. And in Sind, the traditional rivalry

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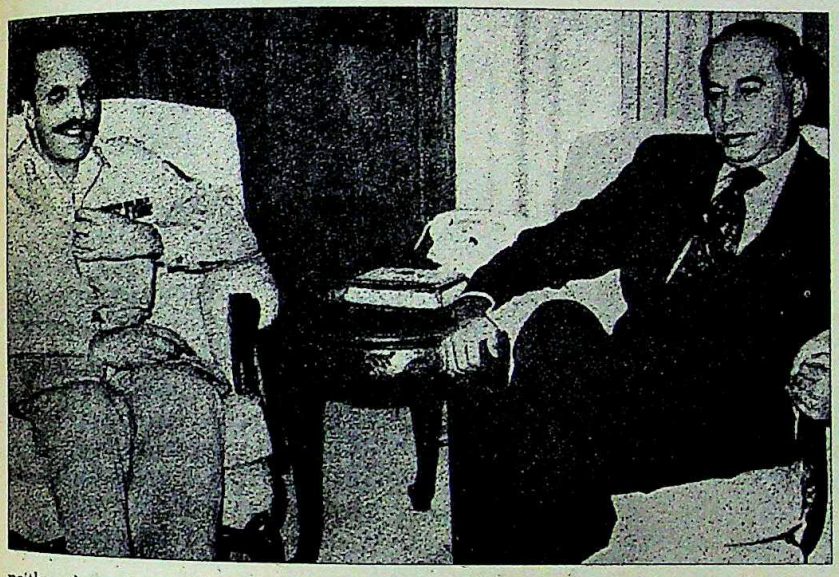
between Junejo and Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, a seasoned former PPP leader who now heads the National People's Party (NPP), another constituent of the nine-party IDA, has ruled out the possibility of an effective electoral front against the PPP.

The electoral challenge for the PPP in Sind comes mainly from the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), representing Urdu-speaking migrants from the subcontinent. The MQM with its militant politics is the dominant presence in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur. It shrewdly resisted pressures to join the IDA. When the results are declared on November 17, if



neither the IDA nor the PPP win a clear majority, as many political pundits predict, the MQM will be well placed to extract its pound of flesh.

IF there is a tie between the PPP and the IDA, President Ishaq Khan's role will become crucial. Although he has steered clear of controversy, there has been strong criticism of his administration on several points—the continuation of Zia's caretaker chief ministers in the provinces creating fears of official rigging, the denial of the old sword symbol to the PPP, and the insistence by authorities that voting will be allowed only on the production of national identity cards. The identity card rule promises to boomerang into a major campaign issue. With barely 25 per cent literacy, and extreme poverty in the countryside, especially in Sind, not many rural voters possess identity cards. The time is now too short for most illiterate voters to acquire them. Furthermore, most landlords, particularly in Sind, fear the independence that comes with the identity card—the peasant can then deal directly with the bureaucracy, especially if he wants to acquire a passport for a job in the Gulf.

Benazir says only 30 per cent of voters have identity cards, while the Government claims that 93 per cent do. If a large number of voters in Pakistan feel deprived of the right to vote on November 16, the consequences could be serious. A similar spark had launched the agitation in 1977 that eventually brought Bhutto's government down. Khan Abdul Wali Khan, whose National Awami Party (NAP), is expected to win a few seats in NWFP, has already declared that he expects rigging.

As the campaigning began, it was clear that both sides would give it their all. The electoral battle will see the settling of an old blood-feud, a confrontation now between the ghosts of Zia and Bhutto. The first salvo was fired by Professor Ghafoor Ahmed, a prominent Jamaat leader and secretary-general of the IDA. "The PPP is solely responsible for all the country's ills since 1970," he declared. On the other side, the entire PPP campaign is focused on the misrule during the Zia interregnum.

Zia died leaving no political party his family members could inherit. His was a one-man rule, and he kept his sons away from the limelight. It was only after his death that the names of his two sons, Ejaz and Anwar, who returned from their homes abroad, began to figure in the media. Initial attempts to promote the sons as political heirs were quickly abandoned, since they lacked a political constituency which could project them as future leaders.

For the Bhuttos, of course, the elections are a long-awaited opportunity to reclaim a political legacy which even 11 years of authoritarian rule could not crush. Murtaza, 33, the elder son, now lives in exile in Syria and cannot return for the elections as he was convicted in Pakistani courts for the terrorist activities of the Al-Zulfikar Organisation. Sanam, the younger daughter who is married to a businessman and lives in London, is apolitical.

Begum Bhutto, 60, who recently returned from exile in France, is contesting from two seats—in Larkana and NWFP. On return, she told newsmen that if the PPP wins the poll, the question of who will become prime minister will be decided by the party's central committee. This fuelled speculation that she saw herself as a contender, and a section of the bureaucracy even indicated its preference for the calmer, less volatile mother. But top party leaders dismiss the controversy as a creation of the media. Benazir meanwhile has been maintaining a punishing schedule, working 18 to 20 hours a day even before campaigning began, to sort out the nomination problems. Though she also took ill for some time, sources asserted she would not be scaling down her campaign programme.

THE APPROACHING ELECTORAL BATTLE IN PAKISTAN WILL SEE THE SETTLING OF AN OLD BLOOD-FEUD. IT IS A CONFRONTATION NOW BETWEEN THE GHOSTS OF ZIA-UL-HAQ AND ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO.

The ghosts of Zia-ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto will doubtless dominate the campaign. But the electoral battle in Pakistan is more than just a shadow play. If the elections are finally held it will indeed be the finest hour for those who have fought for democracy in Pakistan through a succession of authoritarian regimes. And for that fledgling democracy to survive and prosper the Pakistani voter will have to make up his mind and give one of the parties a clear mandate.

—M. RAHMAN in Pakistan

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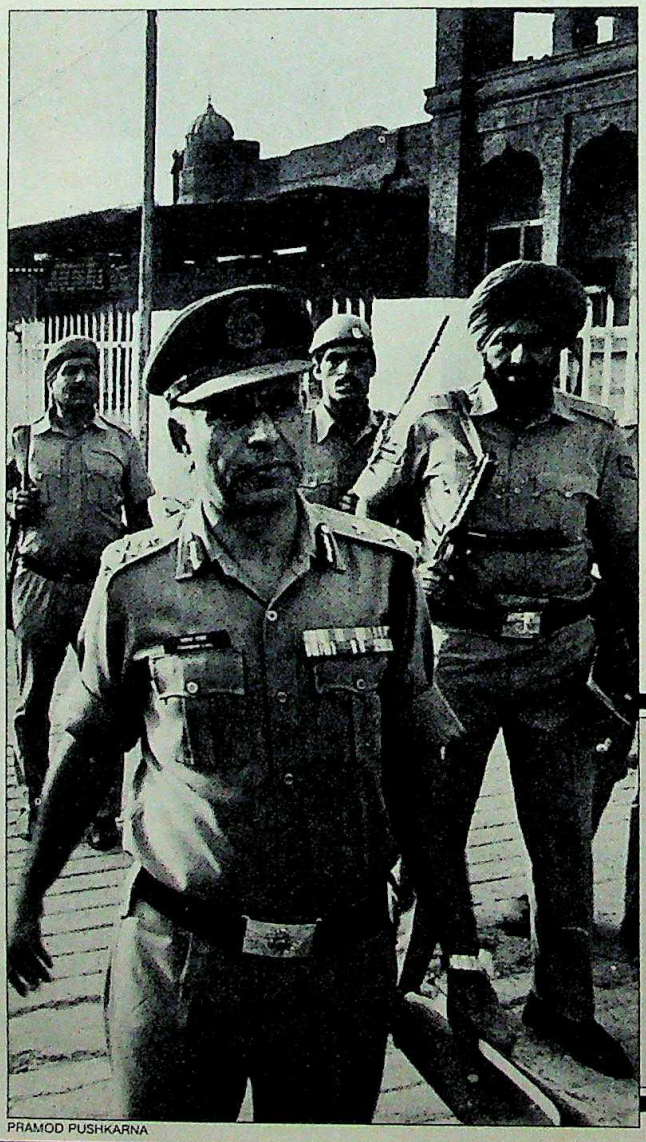
PUNJAB

Madness Without Method

The stormy exit of Punjab inspector general of police Chaman Lal has raised serious questions about the ham-handed way in which the Centre has been handling the state's affairs. The resignation has fuelled debate about the Government's dealings with extremists and its policies of calculated repression.

SUDDENLY he was there once; and then he was there again. After three long years of refusing to set foot in trouble-torn Punjab, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had made two trips in quick succession. It would have appeared that finally the dishonest approach was being jettisoned in favour of one of tact and reconciliation. But there was too much happening that belied this hope. And if there remained any method in the Central Government's madness in the border state, it was only becoming increasingly opaque. In the enaction of bizarre scenarios, the Punjab plansters of New Delhi had last month logged up another first by precipitating the resignation of one of the most upright police officers over an issue of principle; and alongside swamped everyone with a weary sense of *deja vu* by once again pitchforking dismissed Akal Takht chief, Jasbir Singh Rode on to centre stage.

The exit of IGP (border) Chaman Lal, a Padma Shri, must truly rank as sensational. In his tenure as the chief of the badly destabilised border areas, where police corruption and terror have always been a way of life, Chaman Lal had built up a truly phenomenal reputation for honesty and fair play. When Rode, last fortnight, led a march from Damdama Sahib in Bathinda district to the Golden Temple, Amritsar, in order to recapture the Akal Takht, brandishing weapons and shouting secessionist slogans, Chaman Lal sought permission to act. But strangely, he was deterred from doing so. The IGP, unlike other officers, was not one to take the deceit lying down. He pleaded with his seniors, but having got no place, summoned a press conference and announced he was quitting the Punjab Police. (He is originally of the Madhya Pradesh cadre.) Chaman Lal also made clear the reasons for his decision, thoroughly embarrassing the Government, and laying bare the deviousness



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Chaman Lal's exit was sensational. As chief of the border areas, he'd built a reputation for fair play and honesty.

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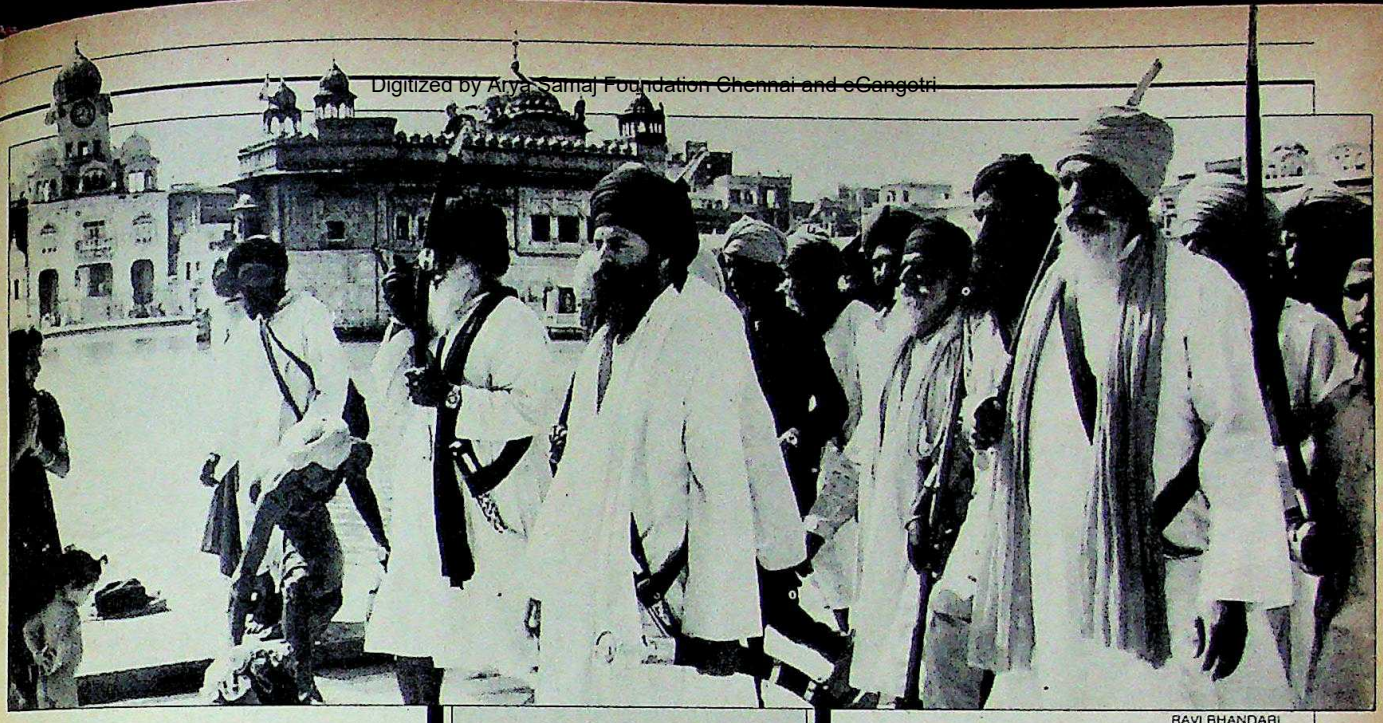

RAVI BHANDARI

of its policy in Punjab.

Chaman Lal's contention was that it would be very difficult to dislodge Rode and his militants from the Golden Temple once they entered and entrenched themselves. He argued that this would nullify the gains of Black Thunder Two, the terrorist flushing out operation he had helped to coordinate. Ordered to refrain from touching Rode's band, Chaman Lal, along with his Senior Superintendent of Police, Suresh Arora, watched helplessly as the sloganeering group entered Amritsar city, defying Section 144 CrPC, and proceeded to the Golden Temple, where they pushed aside armed CRPF jawans at the main entrance. The marchers, mostly youth from the All India Sikh Students' Federation (AISSF) and other isolated militant organisations, then indulged in an orgy of defiance, dismantling the police barricades and threatening to behead Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) officials when they refused to allow Rode the use of the temple loudspeakers. While the terrified SGPC officials complied, the IGP made up his mind, there itself, to quit the Punjab Police.

Rode meanwhile predictably launched into a fiery speech, declaring he would fight for Khalistan if the panth so decided. He once again invoked the handy sarbat khalsa, asserting that the issues of Khalistan, *puran swaraj* (complete freedom), and the Anandpur Sahib Resolution would be sorted out when the next one was convened at Diwali. The ousted Takht chief however played typically safe on the venue—it would be held within the temple or any other suitable place. He also made the inevitable claim that he would

Delhi continues to back Rode. But in Amritsar it is common knowledge that he is a spent force, isolated in panthic politics.

try and bring about a unity of all the militant and Akali factions. The fact of the matter is that Rode's march would have been a non-event, had it not precipitated Chaman Lal's exit. Instead of the thousands of people he was to lead to liberate the temple, he walked at the head of barely 200. The march was lack-lustre, and the arms the plodders brandished were of the most rudimentary variety—swords and spears, instead of the lethal AK-47 assault rifles. And in 10 days of trudging from Bathinda to Amritsar it scarcely created a stir, until it culminated in Chaman Lal's press conference.

THE press conference held at the kotwali in the walled city was perhaps a mistake. Maybe in deference to service conventions, the IGP ought to have disseminated his views in a different manner. But what Chaman Lal said that day went to the heart of the matter, uncovering the devious strands that ensure the Punjab situation does not improve. It sent shock waves running through the administration and the public. He declared he had lost all respect for his senior officers, for the decisions they adhered to were taken by remote perception. For the first time in the blood-soaked history of Punjab terrorism, such a senior officer—or for that matter, any—admitted on record that the security forces in the state indulged in deliberate repression of the common people. He told the amazed Amritsar scribes: "I was told to let loose terror in the villages where terrorists gunned down seven train passengers." He indicated that it was the Director-General of Police (DGP), K.P.S Gill, who had issued these instructions.

Chaman Lal's differences with his seniors on the issue of fighting terrorism had always existed. Rode was merely the last straw that enraged him enough to speak out openly. Chaman Lal had insisted: "Except for a handful of die-hard terrorists, the people should be treated with respect." He reckoned that repression of any sort would prove counter-productive, but his insistence on adopting a more humane approach fell largely on deaf ears. He, however, managed to bring about a palpable change in the hostile environment. A large number of police and district officials in the border districts of Ferozepur, Gurdaspur and Amritsar testify that in those areas the faith of the common people in the administration had gone up dramatically after Chaman Lal took over. Among the measures taken by him in the past six months were:

- The illegal confinement of suspects at police stations and interrogation centres was discouraged, and was sought to be replaced by the process of formal arrests.
- Village panchayats were informed before the police picked up any villager for

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interrogation.

► An attempt was made to differentiate between active harbourers of terrorists and those who give food and shelter out of fear or greed.

► An effort was made to take stringent action against corrupt police officers, and refrain from recommending their names for medals and citations even though they might have shown good results in fighting terrorism.

► Judicial trials were to be preferred to fake encounters and rigged escapes, even in the case of the most dreaded of terrorists.

► The names of persons interrogated and given a clean chit were to be struck off police diaries, so that they did not keep suffering harassment.

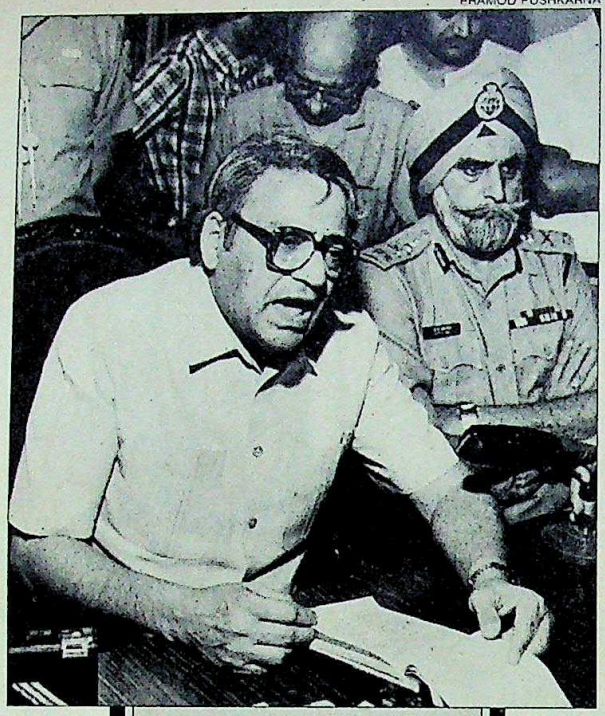
► The lists of terrorists, suspects, harbourers and arms suppliers were to be updated more frequently.

Though Chaman Lal made every effort to carry his precepts on to the field, he remained largely fatalistic about the prospects of the administration winning over the people. He recently told one of his confidants, a civil service officer: "It is certain that the people are not with the terrorists. But unfortunately they are not with us either." He kept trying however. One of his few supporters in the state police—most were resentful that an outsider should hold such a key post—asserts that Chaman Lal became so popular among the masses of his area that today he can win an election from Amritsar against any established leader.

BUT there are detractors; and even among his admirers there are several who feel that the IGP was a trifle too sanctimonious. Left leader Satyapal Dang, while conceding Chaman's incorruptibility, points to the lack of feasibility in his approach. He contends that a sizeable section of responsible police officers and civilians feels that an out and out humane approach to terrorism is impractical.

A central council member of the CPI poses a hypothetical question: "What should my bodyguards do when they see two armed terrorists accompanied by a guide charging into my house? If they don't fire, we all die. If they do and kill the guide, while the actual terrorists escape, will you hand over the guards for killing an innocent, unarmed person, whom we cannot prove guilty?" That is the reason why the majority of honest and forthright police officers differ with Chaman Lal's approach. Most feel it is next to impossible to go by the letter and spirit of the law in an abnormal situation like that of Punjab. Says a Padma Shri decorated colleague of the IGP: "You catch the killer of a hundred people after chasing him for months, would you let him go scot-free to kill more, if the judiciary can't prove his guilt because of a lack of witnesses?"

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Ray continues to keep faith in Gill, despite the fact that this is the second scandal the DGP has been involved in.

DGP K.P.S. Gill is similarly defensive: "Just like Chaman Lal all my senior officers are hand-picked. Most of them are honest and hard-working, barring a few." Gill also terms as 'utter nonsense' the allegation that he had asked the police to 'let loose repression' after the train killings near Tarn Taran. On the contrary, Gill charges: "Chaman Lal was holding public meetings with the Governor's Adviser J.F. Ribeiro in Gurdaspur district while he was needed in Tarn Taran." Punjab Governor S.S. Ray, meanwhile, continues to keep faith in Gill, despite the fact that this is the second scandal he has recently been involved in. The Chaman Lal ethic does not appear to unduly inspire him, and his only reaction to the IGP's quitting was that he ought not to have done it the way he did.

But more than generating heated debates on police ethics, Chaman Lal's exit has once again put a big question mark on the Centre's Punjab policy. It is evident that a power lobby in New Delhi continues to back Rode, and it is amazing that the deposed Takht chief wanders around unhampered, mouthing secessionist declarations. SGPC Secretary, Manjit Singh Calcutta, points to the dishonesty in the Centre's approach: "Leaders like Prakash Singh Badal and Sukhjinder Singh who have never talked about a separate state are languishing in jail, while known hardcore elements like Rode are free to make fiery speeches."

In Amritsar, however, it is common knowledge that Rode is a spent force, totally isolated in present day panthic politics. The SGPC which had appointed him in March this year, sacked him two months later in May. The two major militant organisations, Babbar Khalsa and Khalistan Commando Force, disowned him completely after Operation Black Thunder, while the Panthic Committee, the apex terrorist body, has always opposed him. And, finally, the fountainhead of militancy, the Damdami Taksal, has declared that it has nothing to do with Rode.

Obdurately, however, the Centre continues to play the Rode card. And the manoeuvre has not only ensured that the outstanding Chaman Lal leaves and cools his heels as IGP (computers and telecommunications) at Delhi, but has also confirmed once again that the Rajiv Government's commitment to secularism and democratic forces is highly suspect. It seems obvious that the Centre will continue to play games with the priesthood in Punjab, ignoring all democratic buffers, such as the political parties.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

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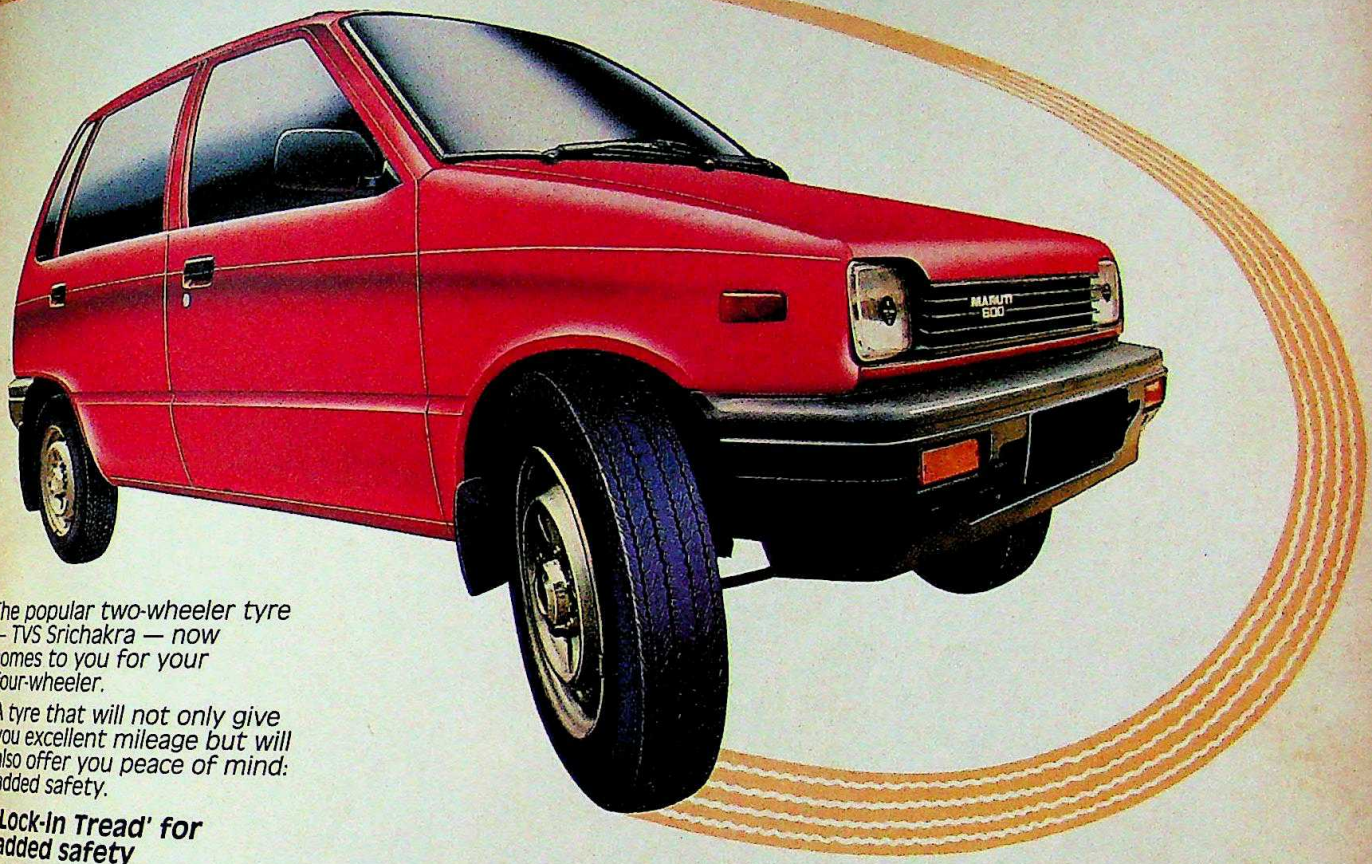
"2" that's paved the way for "4"



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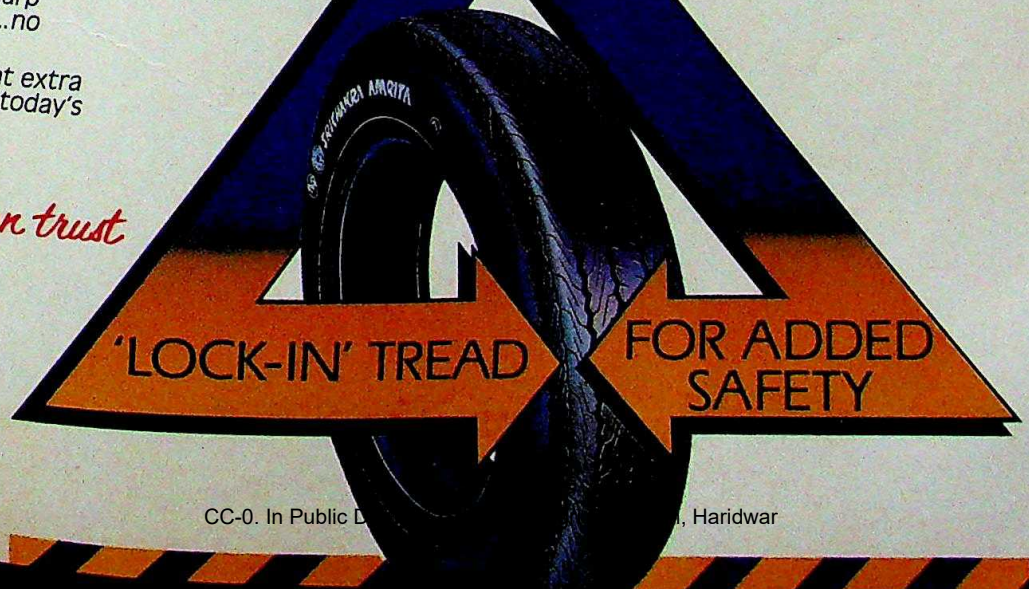

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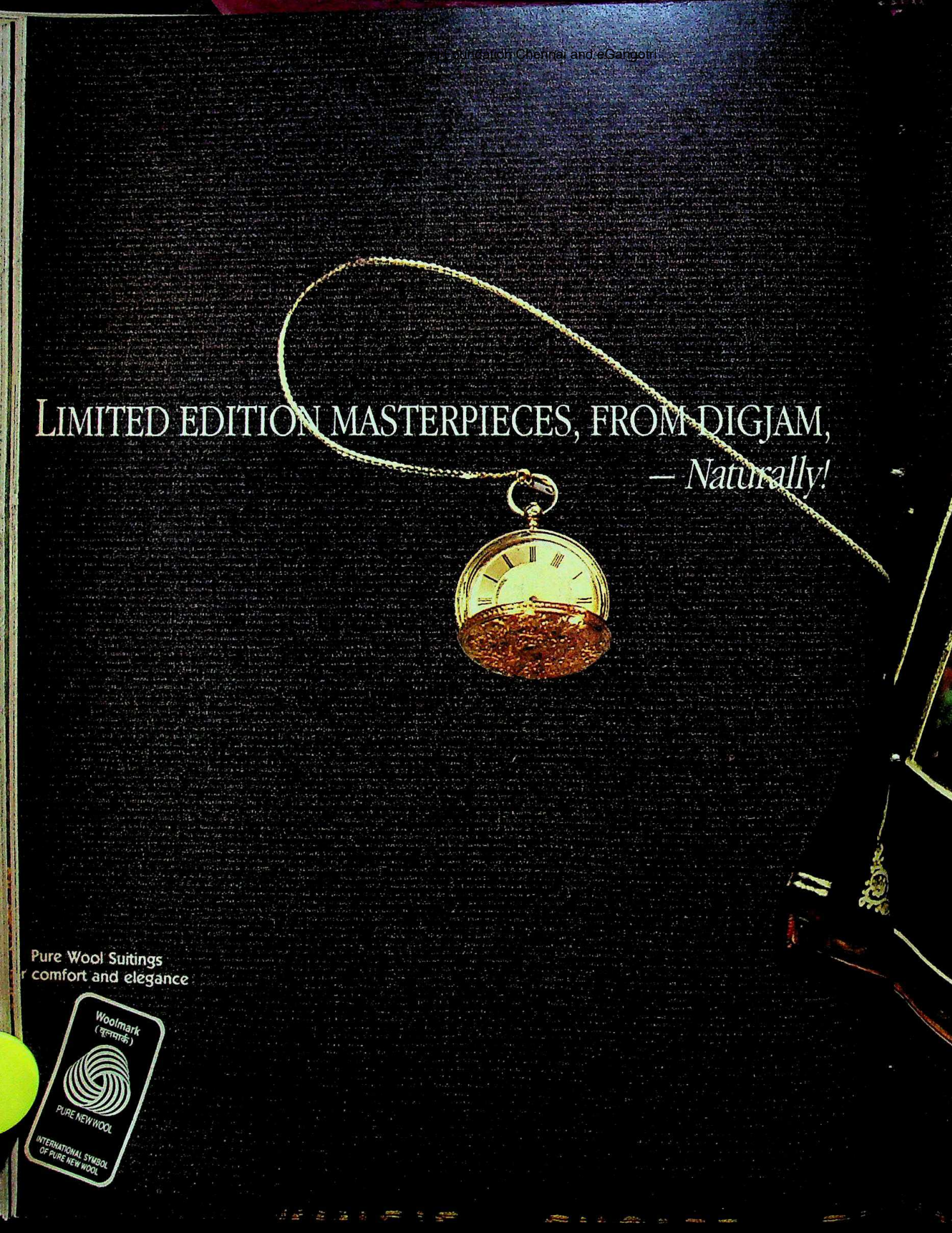

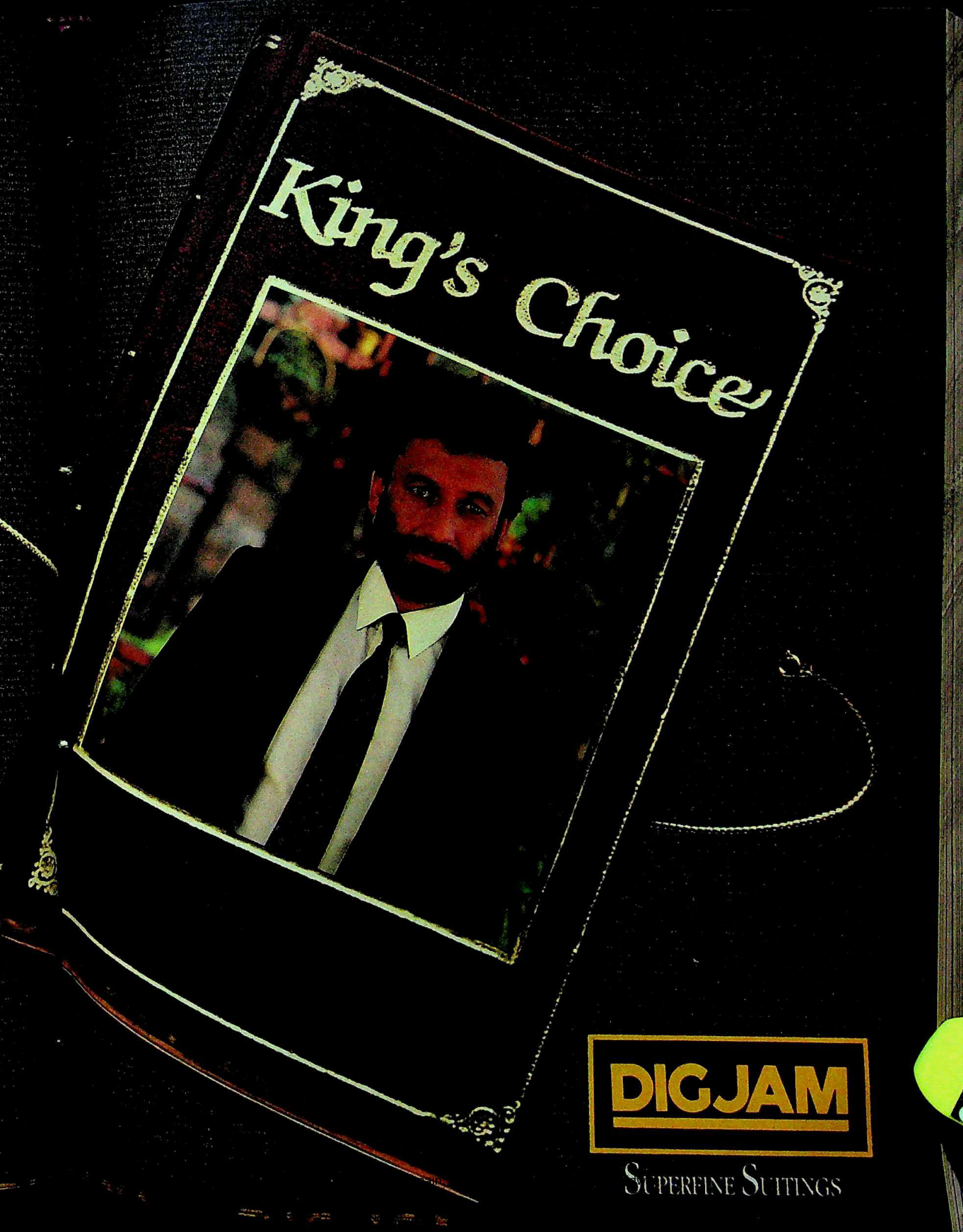
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HARYANA

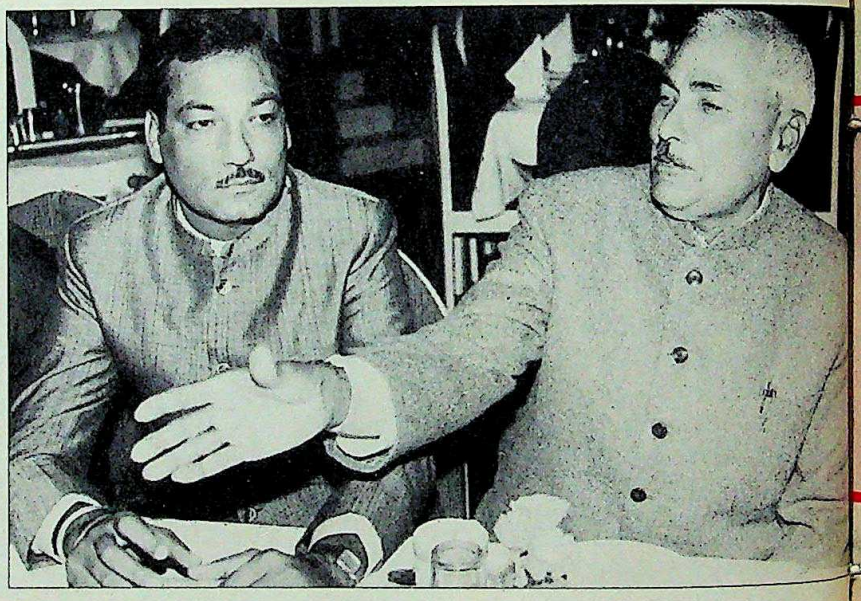
Succession War

Chaudhary Devi Lal is an old-fashioned feudal patriarch, whose fiefdom Haryana, is torn between two prospective inheritors—his sons Om Prakash Chautala and Ranjit Singh. One, a dynamic but semi-educated politico, the other an educated but less aggressive businessman. Sandwiched between the two, Devi Lal tried to pull off a Hegde-type manoeuvre by resigning. The attempt nearly boomeranged, as the ruling Lok Dal nearly split. A report:

HARYANA'S 74-year-old Chief Minister Devi Lal resembles a modern-day Charlemagne. Basking in his new-found importance as the opposition's bouncer—who humbled stalwarts like H.N. Bahuguna and Chandra Shekhar—Devi Lal failed to see the waves of dissidence lapping about his feet in his home state. He imperiously ordered the tide to recede and it didn't. Ultimately Devi Lal had to retreat, his image a little bedraggled.

The Lok Dal supremo must have realised, as others did, that the waves around him were created by his impatient, battling sons, Om Prakash Chautala, 52, and Ranjit Singh, 43, both eager to inherit their father's mantle. Disgusted, the old chaudhary threatened to resign as chief minister last fortnight, only to hastily retract after learning that the state unit of the Lok Dal would instantly split into two groups if the succession question was thrown open. The Janata Dal President V.P. Singh, who drove down to Chandigarh to reason with Devi Lal, finally vetoed the resignation move. This gave the chief minister a face-saving device, and at the same time, saved Haryana from the likely imposition of President's Rule.

The resignation drama in Chandigarh highlighted Devi Lal's dilemma in relation to his sons, whose no-holds-barred campaign has riven the state Lok Dal, the ministry and the entire bureaucracy into Chautala and Ranjit Singh camps. Each faction remains busy checkmating the moves of the other. By threatening to resign, Devi Lal had tried to break out of the vicious circle—only to discover that the resultant chaos would invite the attention of Congress(I) trouble-makers like Bhajan Lal and ultimately President's Rule. This made him stay his resignation but in no way alleviated the succession problem.



Ranjit Singh (left) and Chautala

Like a Haryanvi version of the television serial *Khandaan*, the suspense-filled resignation drama involved all three leading members of the state's current first family—Devi Lal, Chautala and Ranjit Singh. Charges of nepotism and corruption involved Home Minister Sampat Singh who is Chautala's trusted lieutenant in a scandal surrounding the recruitment of about 3,500 constables for the Haryana Police.

A triumphant Devi Lal had just returned to Chandigarh after midwifing the birth of the Janata Dal. In Bangalore, he had intentionally snubbed Sampat Singh for packing the state police force with his relatives and supporters in contravention of the chief minister's advice to recruit constables on the basis of merit and from all the districts and tehsils. "I had told the DG of police not to heed Sampat Singh's instructions (on recruitment)," Devi Lal admitted. Fearing he would be sacked, Sampat Singh sent a resignation letter, assuring Devi Lal that he would stay as loyal to him as "a fifth son".

Haryana officials say that Devi Lal had in fact asked the home minister to resign following widespread complaints from Lok Dal MLAs that only those who had been recommended by Sampat Singh or paid up to Rs 20,000, were recruited. Even some who had paid the money were not recruited, and the MLAs who had recommended them threatened to revolt. To quell their rebellion, Devi Lal doubled the number of vacancies and ordered regularisation of even those recruits who

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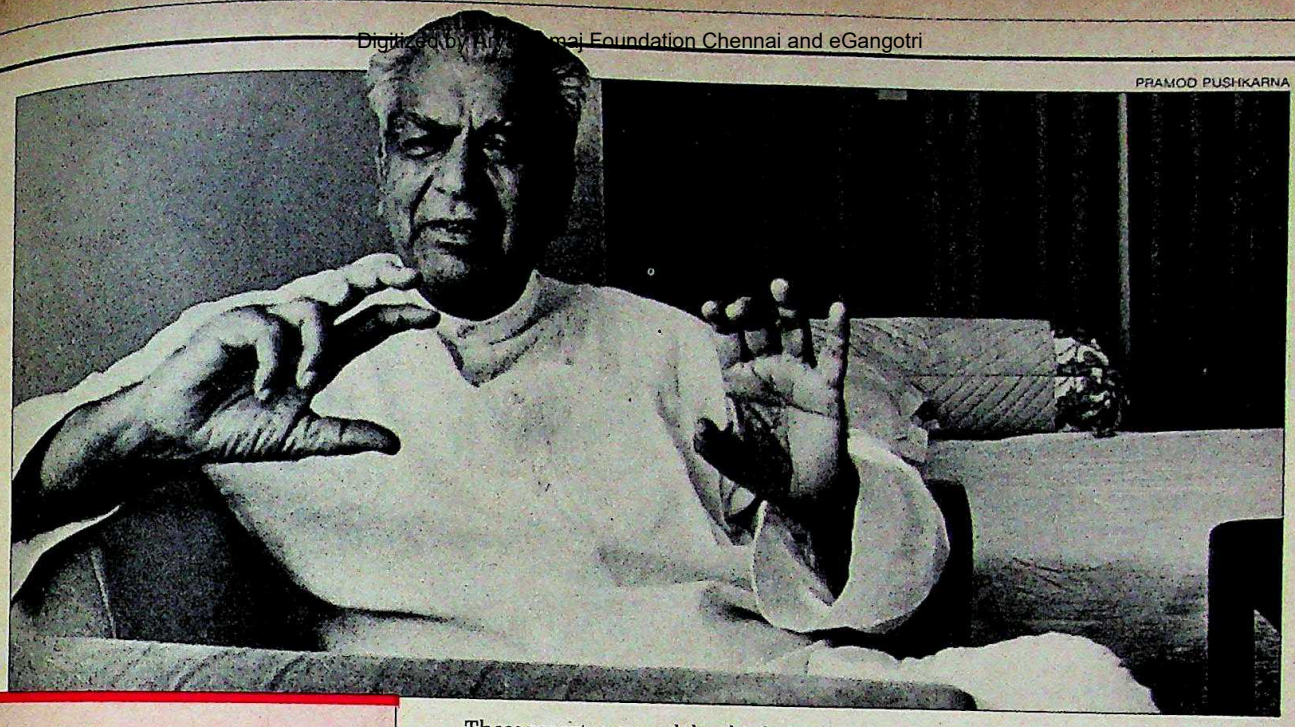

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

The resignation drama highlighted Devi Lal's dilemma in relation to his sons, whose no-holds-barred campaign has riven the state Lok Dal into Chautala and Ranjit Singh camps.

had not met the stringent physical standards.

The fact that bribes had been paid for the police jobs came to light after the all-powerful officer on special duty in the chief minister's secretariat, Dr K.V. Singh, called for the list of recruited constables. He was intrigued by the names of some Bishnois, members of the community to which former chief minister Bhajan Lal belongs. Enquiries revealed that these persons had, in the words of a police official, "paid money to the district superintendents of police, MLAs or ministers to ensure selection". So widespread were rumours of money changing hands, that two SPs in a district selection board orally complained to the Director-General of Police S.S. Brar that the DIG heading the board had taken bribes. Moreover, it was common knowledge that Sampat Singh called district SPs to select his nominees even if standards had to be relaxed.

These reports angered the chief minister who admitted to INDIA TODAY that Sampat Singh had been guilty of favouritism in the recruitment of six constables from among his in-laws and 48 others.

THIS kind of nepotism is not uncommon in Haryana. But it became political dynamite because the man who uncovered the fraud, K.V. Singh, is a close associate of Ranjit Singh, while the victim of the disclosure, Sampat Singh, owes allegiance to Chautala. Sampat Singh's resignation angered Chautala so much that he called his father from Bombay at around 10.25 on the night of October 15 and threatened a revolt in the ministry. Intelligence and political sources confirm that he threatened Devi Lal that one minister and one MLA would resign every day if Sampat Singh was eased out. At the crack of dawn the next morning, Devi Lal called the correspondent of All India Radio and announced that he would submit his resignation to the governor that evening.

AIR news bulletins don't have much credibility in opposition-ruled Haryana, but the news of Devi Lal's intended resignation galvanised the Lok Dal into action. Fearing that Chautala would try to forcibly fill the vacuum created by Devi Lal's resignation, Ranjit Singh and his followers got into the act. From Delhi's Haryana Bhawan, Ranjit Singh's followers led by Ran Singh Mann phoned opposition stalwarts V.P. Singh, Biju Patnaik and George Fernandes and asked them to dissuade Devi Lal from resigning the chief ministership. Biju Patnaik called Devi Lal thrice, so did Fernandes. After instructing Devi Lal to sit tight, V.P. Singh drove down to Chandigarh and after a long discussion with the Haryana strongman, vetoed his resignation. Devi Lal did not forward Sampat Singh's resignation to the governor.

Obviously, Chautala had won his point. Now he and Devi Lal are maintaining a stoic silence on the events leading to the resignation. It does not serve the purpose of the chief minister and his elder son to give credence to or confirm rumours of their confrontation—the threatened revolt by Chautala and Devi Lal's backing down. So Chautala denies he called Devi Lal or threatened a revolt. In fact he says Devi Lal had called him and asked him to return at once to Chandigarh. Devi Lal denies any call was made, but his advisers and staff who were present that day, testify that he did talk on the phone with his elder son. Hours later, he impetuously announced his resignation.

For purposes of public consumption, both Chautala and Ranjit Singh now do not criticise one another. After denying any rift in the family, Ranjit Singh evaded answers to all questions about differences with his elder brother. Chautala, a more wily politician, even waxed eloquent about the warmth of his relationship with his brother. But this show of affection did not prevent Chautala's aides from seeking out journalists later to fill them in about Ranjit Singh's misdeeds. And Ranjit Singh's advisers squarely blame Chautala for triggering off the recent events which nearly toppled the Lok Dal Government. Chautala had threatened a revolt, and

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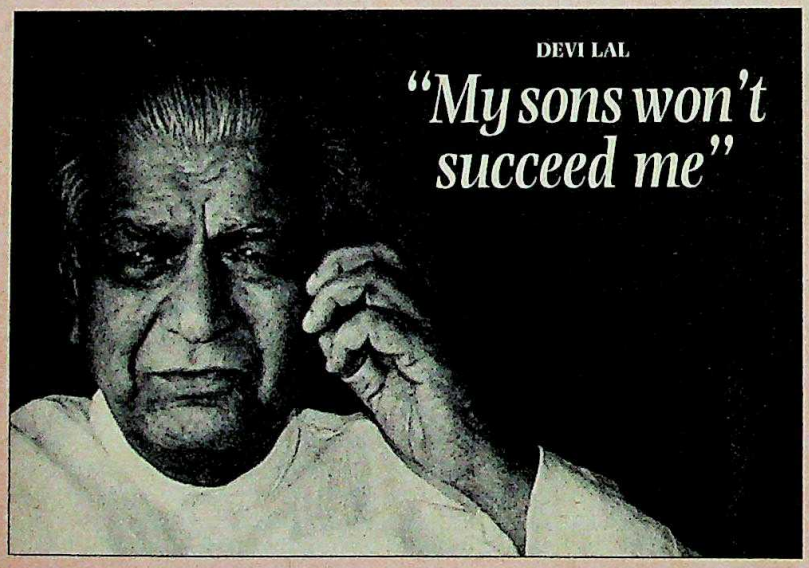
Devi Lal devised the resignation stratagem to divert attention from the real problem, Ranjit's followers say.

Most Lok Dal workers have no doubt that the ministry came very close to being toppled. They say that the Union Home Ministry got into action as soon as Devi Lal's intention to resign was announced. One senior minister maintains that the Congress(I) approached party chief Bahuguna and asked him to split the Haryana Lok Dal legislature party to create a scenario where President's Rule could be imposed. According to Devi Lal, his arch enemy Bhajan Lal even cut short a scheduled visit to the Andamans upon hearing the resignation flash.

But eventually it was Devi Lal's image which suffered. Residents of Chandigarh, who have seen the sons of former chief ministers Partap Singh Kairon and Bansi Lal ruling the roost, now add Devi Lal's name to the list of politicians victimised by ambitious, unscrupulous offspring. "The chief minister is a prisoner of his sons," said a senior bureaucrat not unkindly disposed to Devi Lal. The chief minister started receiving letters from admirers and well-wishers throughout the state, warning him about people who—as one letter puts it—"want to wrest power before their time". The obvious reference was to Chautala who is the more aggressive and machiavellian of the two contenders. So when Devi Lal confided to INDIA TODAY that he had in fact planned to appoint Industry Minister Kripa Ram Punia as chief minister (*see interview*), he was also sending a message to his sons not to take succession for granted.

"Devi Lal may not have realised before this episode, that though the party is united behind him, it will not unquestioningly accept anyone he nominates as his successor," says Mool Chand Jain, one of the kisan leader's closest advisers. This view is generally accepted by most partymen. The succession battle has become so bitter that many persons in the Ranjit Singh camp will never accept Chautala and vice versa. And notwithstanding anything Devi Lal may say, the caste-conscious Jat MLAs of Haryana will never accept a Harijan leader like Punia.

CURRENTLY, Ranjit Singh commands the following of about 24 MLAs and at least four senior ministers whereas the irascible Chautala can count on the support of about 18 MLAs according to one estimate. Any leadership contest in the future will therefore see Chautala ranged directly against Ranjit Singh or Ranjit Singh's possible nominees—Punia and Irrigation Minister Veerender Singh. But till that happens, the two brothers play a big role in helping to run the state administration. "Devi Lal is so busy playing Jaya Prakash Narayan



DEVI LAL

"My sons won't succeed me"

HE is a powerhouse of rustic rhetoric and energy, attributes he used to bulldoze his way to power a year ago. More recently, as the gravelly-voiced Devi Lal was busy herding opposition parties together, there was trouble on the home front as the rivalry between his sons blew up into a full-fledged crisis. While explaining the resignation drama during an hour-long interview with Special Correspondent RAMINDAR SINGH *in Chandigarh last fortnight, Devi Lal dropped the bombshell that he had thought of choosing Harijan bureaucrat-turned-minister Kripa Ram Punia as his successor in preference to his favoured elder son Om Prakash Chautala. Excerpts:*

Q. *What made you resign and then withdraw the resignation?*

A. Remember, every *larai* (struggle) of mine is strategic. This time the strategic need was to free myself from Haryana to run the opposition campaign in an organised and systematic way. It wasn't a sudden decision. I told three Lok Dal leaders a few days earlier that I would resign and spend all my time touring the country in preparation for the coming elections. But V.P. Singh asked me to withdraw my resignation. He said the Opposition has only two stalwarts, me and Hegde, and two state governments whose performance would fetch votes for the Janata Dal. George Fernandes and Biju Patnaik too rang up to say I should not resign. So there was pressure from all sides.

Q. *Then why did you back down?*

A. By then a conspiracy had started. The Centre got into action and made enquiries from our secretariat about the party position in the Assembly and what would attract the provisions of the Anti-Defection Act. Bhajan Lal cut short his Andamans visit the day I resigned, and boasted he would fulfil his promise of toppling Devi Lal in three months.

Q. *It has been said that you resigned because of differences with your elder son Chautala over the resignation of Home Minister Sampat Singh.*

A. There's no truth in that. But five or six days before the event, I'd asked the DIG (CID) to explain why the police had recruited six constables from his (Sampat Singh's) in-laws and 48 others on his recommendation. Someone must have informed Sampat Singh. It has no link with what newspapers have reported. It's a minor issue. No minister would dare to annoy me by submitting his resignation.

Q. *It was assumed you were quitting to enable your son to suceed you.*

A. It's not true that I was planning to leave the chief ministership to my son. I'll tell you a secret. I wanted to make a Harijan the chief minister. K.R. Punia (a former IAS officer who is now industries minister) is influential among the Harijans. In him, the country's Harijans would have found a leader to look up to.

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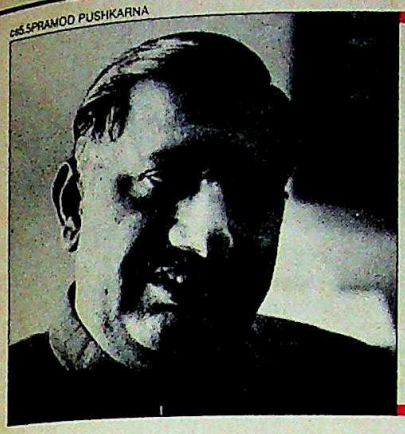

When Devi Lal said he planned to appoint Kripa Ram Punia as chief minister, he was sending a message to his sons not to take succession for granted.

for opposition unity that he has no time for administration," lamented an official.

Advisers like Mool Chand Jain say they have warned Devi Lal more than once about Chautala's blatant interference in the administration. Chautala denies he interferes, but he openly contends it is his right as an elected representative to take people's problems to the Government and its bureaucrats, even to submit lists for police recruitment if he wants. But he did not submit any lists to district SPs. "What's the fun of living if Chautala's name does not cause a stir," Chautala laughs. "Only that person will be criticised who can benefit people or harm them. If I help someone, another's interests are bound to be hurt, maybe my brother's. That cannot be helped." Chautala insists he does not share power with his father, but shoulders most of Devi Lal's burden of dealing with the public "since I am more adept at lying".

That, say his critics, is an art form for him, along with his considerable oratorical skills and organising ability. Compared to him, Ranjit Singh is quieter, more affable and more educated. But of the two, Chautala has more fire in his guts, a greater ambition to run things. This is something Devi Lal half admires and half resents. Chautala is like a skittish racehorse, champing at the bit, as Devi Lal discovered to his dismay last fortnight—and will probably keep discovering during his remaining term as chief minister.

—RAMINDAR SINGH with VIPUL MUDGAL

And it would have been part of my strategy to mobilise a coalition of Ajgars (an acronym for Ahirs, Jats, Gujjars and Rajputs) and break free of the restrictive label of a Jat leader that newspapers have stuck on me. Don't forget that Jats in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan are in a position to ensure victory in a large number of seats. So now I have started this *shosha* about Ajgars to bring these communities together. I told you all my decisions are strategic.

Q. ***What is your strategy for the future?***

A. If I reveal it then it would not remain a strategy. I have told you of my plans for Punia which remained incomplete. Which is why I leaked it.

Q. ***It is widely believed that when you are out of Haryana, the state administration is run by your sons.***

A. This is incorrect. I've already told you that my son was not to be my successor, but Punia was. My sons did not even know of my resignation, neither was in town. I didn't even tell M.S. Pannu, my political adviser for the last 20 years. The fact is that my sons don't have the *himmat* to discuss politics with me. So the story that I resigned after an altercation over the phone with Om Prakash is far fetched. So is the question that one of them will succeed me. Both are working hard to impress me. Om Prakash is a renowned orator and organiser, while the younger one has a sweet reasonable way of dealing with people. Both have their strong points, but the people have given this mandate to me, not to my sons.

Q. ***And it is not transferable?***

A. How can it be? For me the chief ministership is of no consequence. I regard it as a means to an end. And I'm confident that had I resigned, Haryana would still have been run on my instructions.

Q. ***What is your strategy for the Opposition?***

A. *"Mein Congress ko saaf karkay rakh doonga"* (I will obliterate the Congress). And the BJP and the communists will be with us in this. I consider the regional parties to be the original parties, like the Telugu Desam, DMK, Asom Gana Parishad. We will not put up candidates against them. Where they are weak we have asked them to accept our candidates. This will be the pattern in Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala.

Q. ***The people have not forgotten 1979, and they fear that these former Janata men will again fall out the way they did the last time.***

A. The unity of 1977 wasn't really unity. It was a coming together forced by fear of the Emergency *danda*. The current unity has been forged after one year and 18 days of discussion and debate. Even the *Mahabharat* finished in 18 days.

Q. ***Is not your Mahabharat continuing?***

A. It's over. The caravan has started. Whoever joins now can come along, the rest will be left behind.

Q. ***What role do you see for yourself in national politics now?***

A. I won't contest either for the Lok Sabha or the Vidhan Sabha. I'm already 74. I will use my reputation and the record of my performance as chief minister to help others win. Already the effect of the pension schemes and unemployment relief I started is being felt all over the country. Uttar Pradesh was forced to raise the purchase price of sugarcane from Rs 27 to Rs 31 per quintal to bring it on level with the price in Haryana. Now watch the *tamasha* after I make a big announcement at a public meeting soon.

Q. ***What kind of changes do you envisage if the Opposition comes to power?***

A. At least the kind of changes that you see in Haryana, like loans being waived.

Q. ***Have they really been waived?***

A. Yes, Rs 248-crore worth. Rajiv and Bansi Lal are partly correct in charging that many people are still getting recovery notices. Who are getting notices? The son of Tapase (former Haryana governor has an outstanding loan of Rs 92 lakh). Kamalapati Tripathi's daughter-in-law has an outstanding loan of Rs 37.5 lakh for a factory she put up in Panipat. Rs 1.82 crore stands unpaid by Bhajan Lal's son-in-law and his political secretary Ugrsain owes Rs 12 lakh. There is no (former) minister who doesn't owe Rs 5 lakh to 7 lakh. Forty one persons in the prime minister's household staff were given plots for Rs 5,000 each. Also 70 persons who gave their address as care of Rashtrapati Bhawan.

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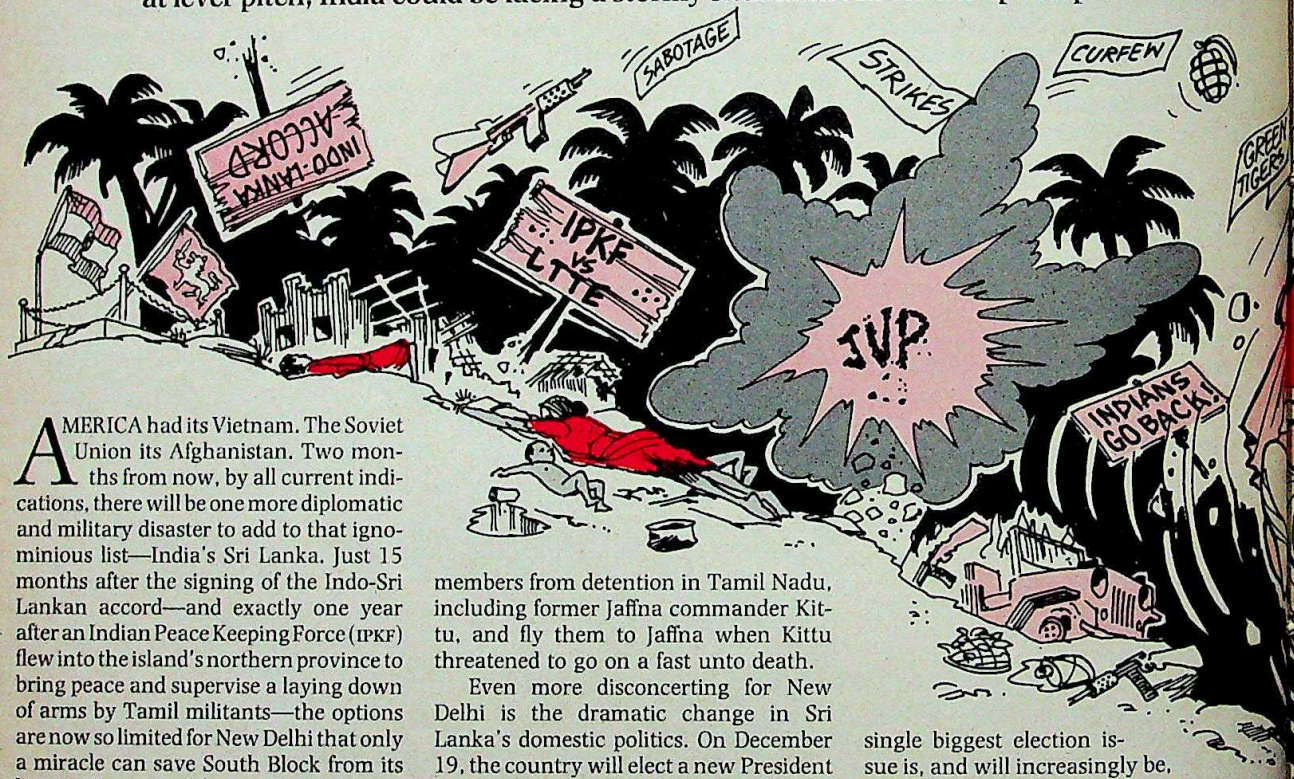
SRI LANKA

On the Brink

With presidential elections scheduled for December 19, the situation in Sri Lanka has taken a dramatic turn—and is ominous for India and the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. The two main contestants, Ranasinghe Premadasa and Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, are both strongly opposed to the accord and the presence of Indian soldiers on Sri Lankan soil. With anti-Indian sentiments now at fever pitch, India could be facing a stormy situation. An on-the-spot report.



AMERICA had its Vietnam. The Soviet Union its Afghanistan. Two months from now, by all current indications, there will be one more diplomatic and military disaster to add to that ignominious list—India's Sri Lanka. Just 15 months after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord—and exactly one year after an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) flew into the island's northern province to bring peace and supervise a laying down of arms by Tamil militants—the options are now so limited for New Delhi that only a miracle can save South Block from its biggest foreign policy embarrassment in 41 years.

But in the present surcharged atmosphere in Sri Lanka, miracles are no longer in currency. Consider the facts. The IPKF, having initially promised to tame the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) within a matter of days, is still a long distance from that objective one year later, having lost 700 soldiers in the process. Tiger leader Pirabhakaran has evaded the IPKF's cordon-and-search operations with almost childish ease. The local Tamil population in the north now views the IPKF with suspicion and even hostility. Last fortnight, the Indian Government was forced to release 157 LTTE members from detention in Tamil Nadu, including former Jaffna commander Kittu, and fly them to Jaffna when Kittu threatened to go on a fast unto death.

Even more disconcerting for New Delhi is the dramatic change in Sri Lanka's domestic politics. On December 19, the country will elect a new President to replace Junius Richard Jayewardene who has dominated the political scene for the last 11 years. The choice: the ruling United National Party (UNP) candidate, Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa, the country's most consistent India-baiter and a vociferous critic of the accord. Or, even more likely, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the common candidate for an eight-party opposition alliance, who has publicly pledged to abrogate the accord and demand the withdrawal of the IPKF "within 24 hours of being elected".

Last fortnight, both candidates kicked off their campaigns with a string of public meetings all across the southern part of the island where it was obvious that the single biggest election issue is, and will increasingly be, the presence of 60,000 Indian troops on the island. There is not a single Sinhalese today, however moderate or liberal, who does not believe that the IPKF is deliberately not trying to kill or capture Tiger leader Pirabhakaran. With him out of the way, the LTTE's back would be broken and that would possibly put pressure on the IPKF to stage a withdrawal.

In fact, the most telling example of the widespread suspicion of India's intentions and the emotional resistance to the presence of the IPKF is how various sections of society view the area under control of the "occupation forces". Extreme elements say that "one-third of the island is in Indian hands". The Sinhala chauvinists

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say that "60 per cent of the coastline" is occupied by India while the moderates' version is that "two out of nine provinces" are controlled by India.

And however much the anti-Indian rhetoric on the campaign trail may be election-related, the snowballing public resistance to the accord and the IPKF presence is certain to ensure that come Christmas, New Delhi will find itself with its tail in an ever-narrowing crack.

The reasons for that pessimistic forecast are plentiful. But just one telling indication is the fact that South Block and the Indian High Commission in Colombo are, incredibly enough, hoping that Premadasa wins in December. In a recent interview with a Sri Lankan daily, India's high-profile High Commissioner in Colombo, J.N. Dixit, referred to Premadasa's stand as "constructive", a remarkable turn-about considering the prime minister was till recently seen by South Block as the villain of the peace. During his election campaign, Premadasa has not been as harshly critical of the accord and the IPKF presence as he was widely expected to be. He has not, for instance, announced that he would scrap the accord but has stuck to his earlier stand that he would "renegotiate" the accord in preference for a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, similar to the one New Delhi signed with Moscow. On the IPKF issue, he has, however, been more forthcoming. At his election speech in Kandy he stated: "As it is, I cannot go to the Indian prime minister and demand such a withdrawal. But if I receive this mandate (for President), I can then say to the IPKF 'thank you, you can go now'."

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

The more likely scenario, however, is that it will be Mrs Bandaranaike who will make that request, a prospect that is even more daunting for South Block. After 11 years of UNP rule, a vast majority of Sri Lankans are obviously desperate for a change of guard. Admits a senior Indian diplomat in Colombo: "Mrs Bandaranaike definitely has an edge in the presidential race." Under any other circumstances, Mrs Bandaranaike's long-standing relations with the Gandhi family would have ensured that New Delhi favoured her candidature. But three factors have helped demolish that myth.

One, with anti-Indian sentiments currently running at fever pitch within the majority Sinhalese community, she cannot afford to take a moderate stand on the accord or the IPKF presence if she is to win the presidential race. Second, a serious diplomatic gaffe on the part of High Commissioner Dixit has soured hopes of winning her over to India's point of view. In an interview to a local daily, Dixit stated that both Mrs Bandaranaike and her son Anura (currently leader of the Opposition in Parliament) in private conversations with him had never said that they would abrogate the accord. Even if that were true, Dixit, a seasoned diplomat, should have known what the reaction would be in a hyper sensitive pre-poll situation. Mrs Bandaranaike promptly lashed out at Dixit and charged him with "blatant interference in the internal politics of Sri Lanka". When approached for an interview by INDIA TODAY, Mrs Bandaranaike and Anura refused saying that Dixit's statements had made them suspicious of all Indians, including journalists.

But it is the third factor that is easily the most worrying for New Delhi. In yet another of the many paradoxical twists that the Sri Lankan situation has taken, Mrs Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) has forged an unholy alliance with the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), the outlawed extremist group that has been responsible for a wave of terror, mainly directed at UNP members.

In the last few weeks, the JVP has stepped up its disruptive activities by forcing the closure of educational institutions and orchestrating a series of bandhs and strikes all across the southern and central provinces. The JVP's actions are in support of their rabid opposition to the UNP, the accord, the presence of the IPKF and the merger of the north and east.

But in the process, the organisation has acquired a political importance unimaginable a year ago. Like the LTTE's role in the north, the JVP's writ is unquestionable in the south where its terror tactics have inculcated such a climate of fear that few dare oppose it openly. In fact, despite being outlawed, and the general repugnance against its methods, the organisation has attracted a sizeable and well-armed following, mainly among the young, unemployed youth.

Now, with the presidential race bound to be a close and bloody one, the SLFP knows it cannot win without the support of the JVP. The paradox may be painful—in 1971, it was Mrs Bandaranaike as prime minister who ruthlessly crushed the organisation, killing some 2000 JVP activists—but so are the political realities in Sri Lanka today. Most Sinhalese, how-

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ever critical of its methods, see the JVP as the only bulwark against "Indian imperialism", a term that, under the current paranoia in the country, includes everything: from Tamil militants in the north expanding their area of operations to India's supposedly sinister designs of a permanent military presence in Sri Lanka, including the south. Even Premadasa has been making conciliatory remarks about the JVP in a bid to woo it to his side of the fence. He has said that none of the killings—in which the victims have mainly been Sinhalese—could be linked to the JVP, a stand totally at odds with that of his party. Even during his election speeches he has been careful not to criticise the organisation.

One key indication of the JVP's recent and sudden public acceptance is that a senior party representative is present at the meetings of leaders of the opposition alliance to thrash out a final agenda and manifesto, a situation unimaginable a few months ago. "My opinion of the JVP is more moderate than earlier. Like everybody else, I had this frightening image of them. But today, I am sitting next to him. I can talk to him," says M.H.M. Ashraf, leader of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), one of the constituents of the alliance.

With Mrs Bandaranaike likely to win the presidential elections, India will be trapped in a situation of its own making.

The alliance itself is a uniquely diverse grouping that includes the SLFP, the JVP, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, the Eksath Lanka Janatha Pakshaya, the SLMC, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Workers Congress. Says Liberal Party leader Dr Chanaka Amaratunga: "We are a diverse grouping and it will take time to reach a common consensus. But we are making progress." In political terms, however, the other six have little clout and it will be the SLFP and the JVP who will call the shots.

BOTH need each other in equal measure. The SLFP has the mass political base and the organisation but it needs the storm-troopers, or, as one SLFP leader puts it, the "cutting edge" of the JVP to counter the muscle that the UNP has at its command. Both Premadasa and UNP Chairman Ranjan Vijeratne control what are popularly known as the "Green Tigers", street thugs who were largely responsible for the anti-Tamil holocaust in 1983, and are now gunning for the SLFP and its allies.

Last fortnight, Mrs Bandaranaike filed a police complaint charging members of the Prime Minister's Security Unit and UNP thugs of sealing an SLFP-owned printing press turning out propaganda material for the presidential campaign and destroying posters and leaflets. She also charged the UNP with harassing and threatening her party workers involved in the election campaign. Last week, armed thugs broke into the farm of Ronnie de Mel, the former UNP finance minister who quit the Cabinet to join up with Mrs Bandaranaike. De Mel poses a major threat to the UNP's chances since he has been attacking the Government's policies, backed by convincing facts and his intimate knowledge of party affairs.

But the SLFP does suffer from some major handicaps, not the least being its past record in office when Mrs Bandaranaike ushered in a tightly-controlled economy which meant long queues for essential items and strict rationing. The UNP propaganda machine has concentrated its attack on her economic performance. On the outskirts of Ratnapura, a huge and sinister cut-out of Mrs Bandaranaike looms over the landscape. The one-line caption simply states: "Remember me?"

To the SLFP's advantage, however, there are a large number who don't. Because there have been no elections in Sri Lanka for 11 years, an estimated 30 per cent of the electorate will be voting for the first time. The odds are that this young and impressionable section will back the opposition alliance. For one, they have reached electoral maturity at a time when their island paradise has been turned into a bloody battlefield, when the educational system has been totally disrupted and the economic and employment situation looks bleaker by the day. As far as they are concerned, the blame for that lies squarely with the UNP.

The SLFP, by merging with the alliance, has also widened its popular appeal among the minorities, mainly the Muslims and the Tamils who have no reason to love the UNP. The Muslims, though opposed to a merger of the northern and

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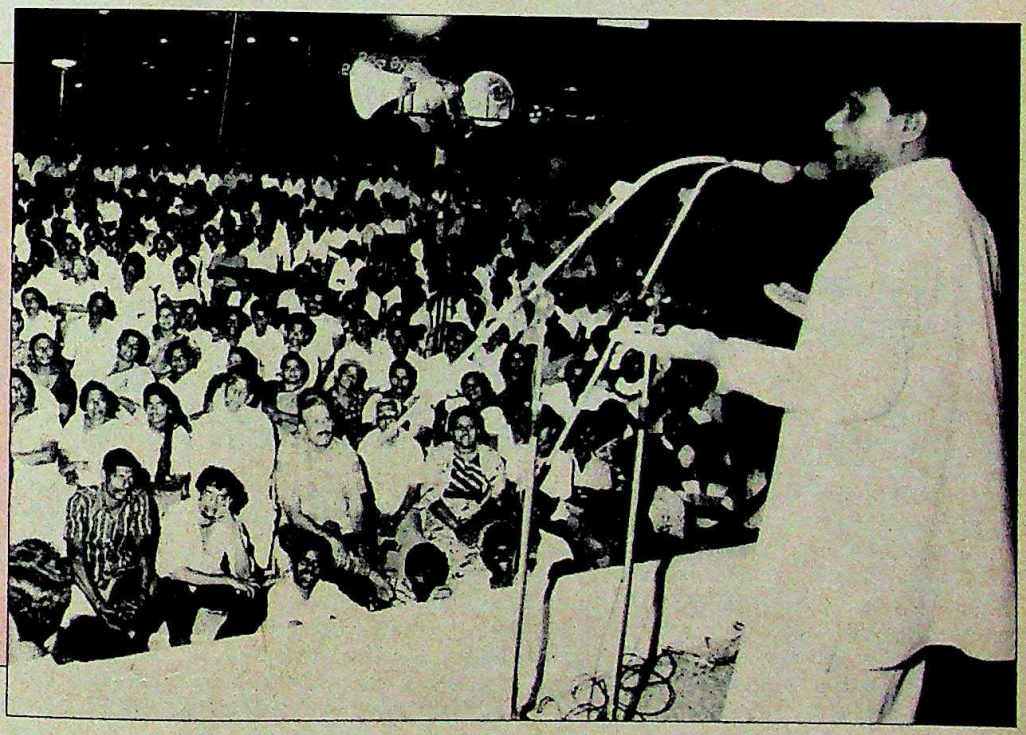
eastern provinces, are backing the Tamils and the LTTE since they consider both to be threatened by the Sinhala chauvinist parties. Surprisingly, even the JVP has issued statements supporting the Tamil cause—one of their key demands is that Tamil be made an official language.

But it cannot be denied that Jayewardene's choice of Premadasa as presidential candidate and successor is a political master stroke. Premadasa is, as he keeps reminding his audience, "a man of the people". A self-made man who rose to power from the slums of Colombo through the union movement, Premadasa is seen as someone more in tune with the common man's aspirations. He is also, perhaps more vitally, seen as a man who is opposed to the accord and the presence of the IPKF. The other advantage is that by plumping for Premadasa, Jayewardene has shifted himself to the background. This means that Jayewardene can pass the buck for any official stand that goes against Indian interests on to Premadasa. Says UNP Chairman Ranjan Vijeratne: "We are being seen by the people as a weak government which cannot safeguard the lives of the people or the national interest. We must convince the people that we can be tough when we want to be."

Premadasa has pledged that he will not only ensure the withdrawal of the IPKF but also renegotiate the Indo-Sri Lankan accord.



The UNP has also cleverly obtained the support of one million plantation Tamils who are under the control of S. Thondaman, minister for rural industries, by granting citizenship to those who have been stateless till now. Admits Thondaman: "It was done in the short-term interests of the elections. But we will back the UNP to the hilt."

THE real catch is that the entire election scenario could be turned on its head if Jayewardene gives in to the snowballing pressure to dissolve Parliament and installs a caretaker government comprising representatives of various political parties till the presidential and parliamentary polls (due by August 1989) are held. The demand to dissolve Parliament has been made by the JVP during its current campaign of terror and disruption. It has been repeated by representatives of the opposition alliance during a recent meeting with the President. And last week, the influential Buddhist clergy threw its hat into the political ring. In a joint letter to Jayewardene, the four heads of the Buddhist clergy outlined a four-point plan aimed at restoring peace which included the dissolution of Parliament and installation of a caretaker government representative of all parties.

The UNP Government is hardly likely to give in to that demand. With its popular appeal eroding rapidly, the UNP needs the government machinery and support to win any election, presidential or parliamentary. At the moment, the UNP enjoys a four-fifths majority in Parliament and there will be tremendous pressure from ruling party MPs not to give in, since very few of them can be sure of winning a seat in the next general elections.

In such a crisis situation, getting hotter by the day, New Delhi can do little to protect its interests. Having burnt its bridges with the SLFP, thanks to Dixit's gaffe, the only hope lies with Premadasa. But once he is installed, India can no longer depend on Jayewardene's support, which is all that has saved it so far from embarrassment. With popular opinion being what it is, Premadasa will hardly be in a position to safeguard Indian interests, nor will he want to, since that would mean political suicide.

The accord itself has lost much of its credibility. The provincial council elections held in the north were pretty much of a farce with candidates of Tamil groups hostile to the LTTE being elected unopposed. Without the LTTE, the legitimacy of the elections is in grave doubt. Elections to the eastern provincial council, which will decide the future of the merger issue, are equally in doubt. Current indications are that Premadasa will stall the elections till after the presidential contest, by which time the accord could be rendered meaningless. Last week, the LTTE asked Tamils and Muslims in the eastern province to boycott the elections which, it stated, "were undemocratic, fraudulent and unjust". The LTTE also has the power to disrupt the elections through violence.

In the north, the IPKF is also caught in a cleft stick. In military terms it faces a stalemate, being unable to counter the LTTE land-mines that are taking a heavy

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toll, or to crush the movement which is weakened but far from finished as a fighting force. They have also lost the sympathy of the Tamil civilians. Says V. Yogeswaran, former MP from Jaffna: "The IPKF has only itself to blame for its behaviour. But the Tamils would rather have the Indians there than the Sri Lankan forces, even though they're becoming increasingly unpopular."

That is a situation that could no longer be in India's hands. A secret assessment of the IPKF's role in Sri Lanka, carried out by a senior army officer and submitted to army headquarters, concludes that a honourable withdrawal is now in the best interests of the country and the Indian Army. Already, the damage to the morale and pride of the Indian soldier and the death toll in the operations have reached unacceptable levels. Says a senior army officer in Colombo: "In just one year, the IPKF operations have destroyed the myth of India's fighting forces."

Once President Jayewardene is out of power, the accord will be rendered meaningless.

New Delhi's dilemma is that if it pulls out now, it would lay itself open to charges that it is leaving the Tamils in the lurch, a situation that is made trickier with assembly elections in Tamil Nadu round the corner. Says a senior Indian High Commission official in Colombo: "There may be problems in implementing the accord in full measure but let us accept that it has ensured devolution of power and citizenship for the Tamils. It has put the Tamil issue squarely on the agenda of every political party. That is a major achievement." There is, however, the other side of the coin—that by raising Tamil aspirations so high, the Indians may have created a bigger problem than they can handle. The LTTE is determined that it will settle for nothing short of Eelam, or a separate state comprising the north and east. That, no government in Colombo will be prepared to give.

But in the long run, and in the long-term interests of India—and the Indian Army—a phased withdrawal of the IPKF is the only available option. Announcement of a phased withdrawal, perhaps leaving a much smaller force to offer protection and pre-empt the deployment of Sri Lankan security forces would certainly satisfy the Sinhalese and, to some extent, the LTTE as well. At the moment, it is the size of the IPKF on Sri Lankan soil that is an emotive and political issue.

Already, by its messy handling of the Sri Lankan affair, New Delhi has lost a friend and gained a foe. With Jayewardene out of the picture, any government in Colombo will be forever suspicious of Indian moves. Further, the extent of anti-Indian feeling among the common citizens will take a long time and much diplomatic effort on the part of South Block to reverse.

IN that context, the other option for India that could help salvage some of its lost influence would be the replacement of High Commissioner Dixit. Though one of the most experienced diplomats in the foreign office, Dixit has obviously allowed his personal involvement in the Sri Lankan situation to affect his judgement—as was the case in his recent interview. As the man on the spot, Dixit is now seen as the embodiment of "Indian imperialism and expansionism". He is also viewed by the LTTE as the villain of the piece and it has refused to have any future dealings with him. His removal would certainly lessen the level of suspicion and hostility against India that currently—and visibly—exists.

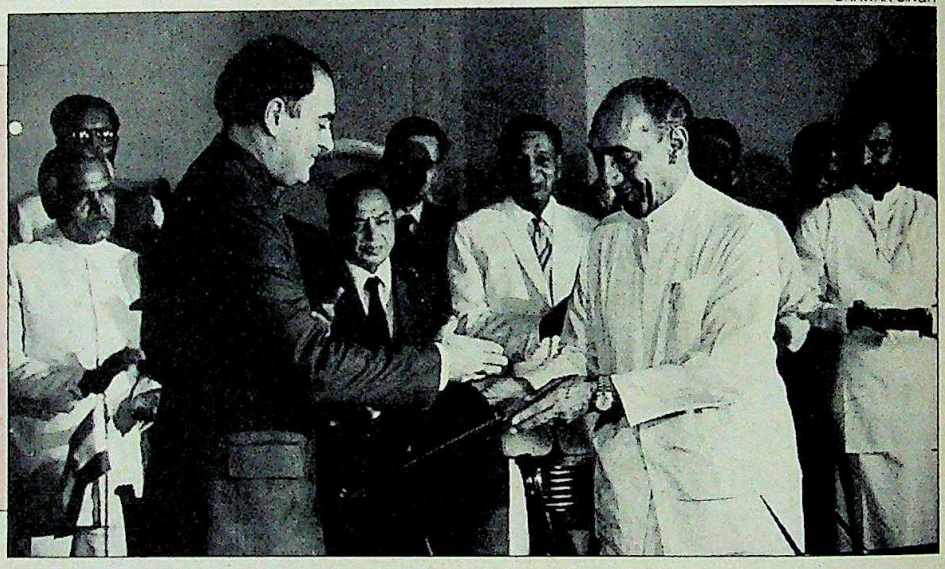
However, it is doubtful if South Block will back out now, when it can still salvage some pride. Having taken the plunge, New Delhi will hardly be prepared to accept that its calculations were disastrously wrong. It is also convinced that its broader strategic interests need to be protected, as do the Tamils whom it has backed for so long and with such grim if misplaced determination.

But whether New Delhi will have any say in deciding whether Indian troops stay on in Sri Lanka or not is now open to question. According to the accord, the IPKF was sent in at the request of the President of Sri Lanka. A new President will have equal right to ask it to leave. If it refuses, on grounds that the Tamils will be defenceless, India faces the prospect of hostile international opinion.

The worst-case scenario is even grimmer. If India is forced to withdraw the IPKF by the end of the year, it will have little option but to satisfy domestic opinion in Tamil Nadu—that the Tamils have not been left defenceless—and national opinion—that the loss of the lives of Indian soldiers has not been in vain. The only way to do that will be to resume covert arms supply and financial support to the LTTE. Considering the bumbling manner in which New Delhi has handled its Sri Lankan misadventure since last July, that would somehow be a fittingly ironic denouement.

—DILIP BOBB in Colombo

BHAWAN SINGH



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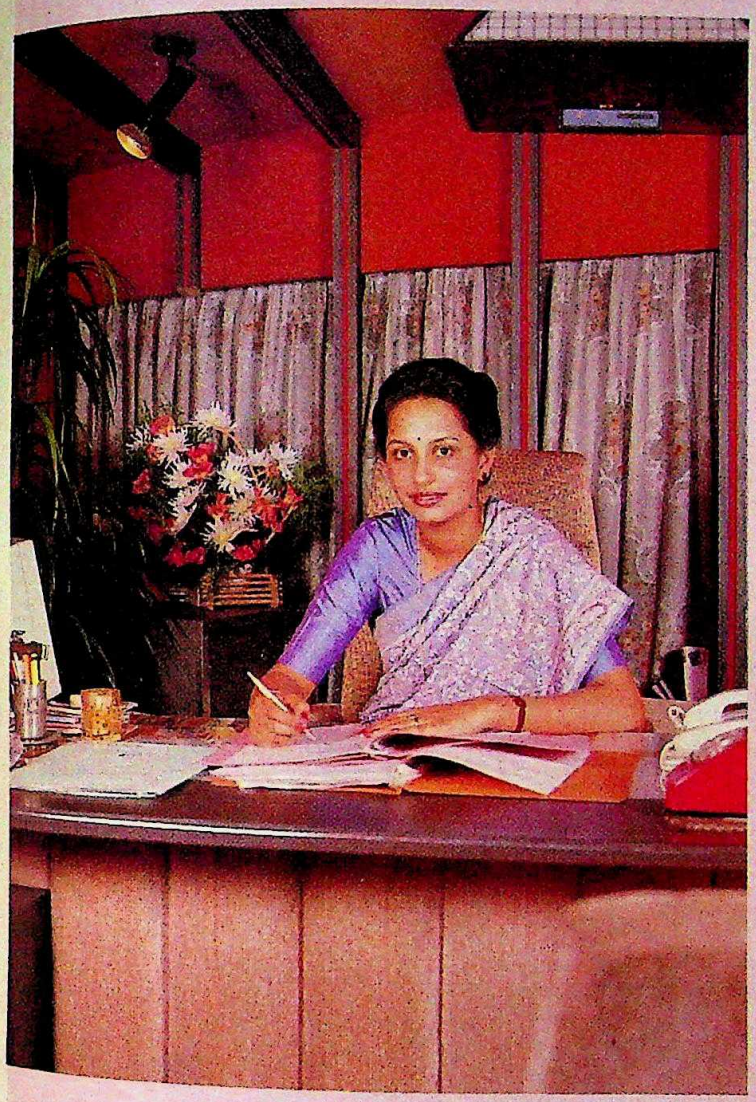

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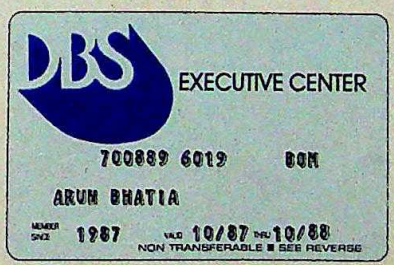

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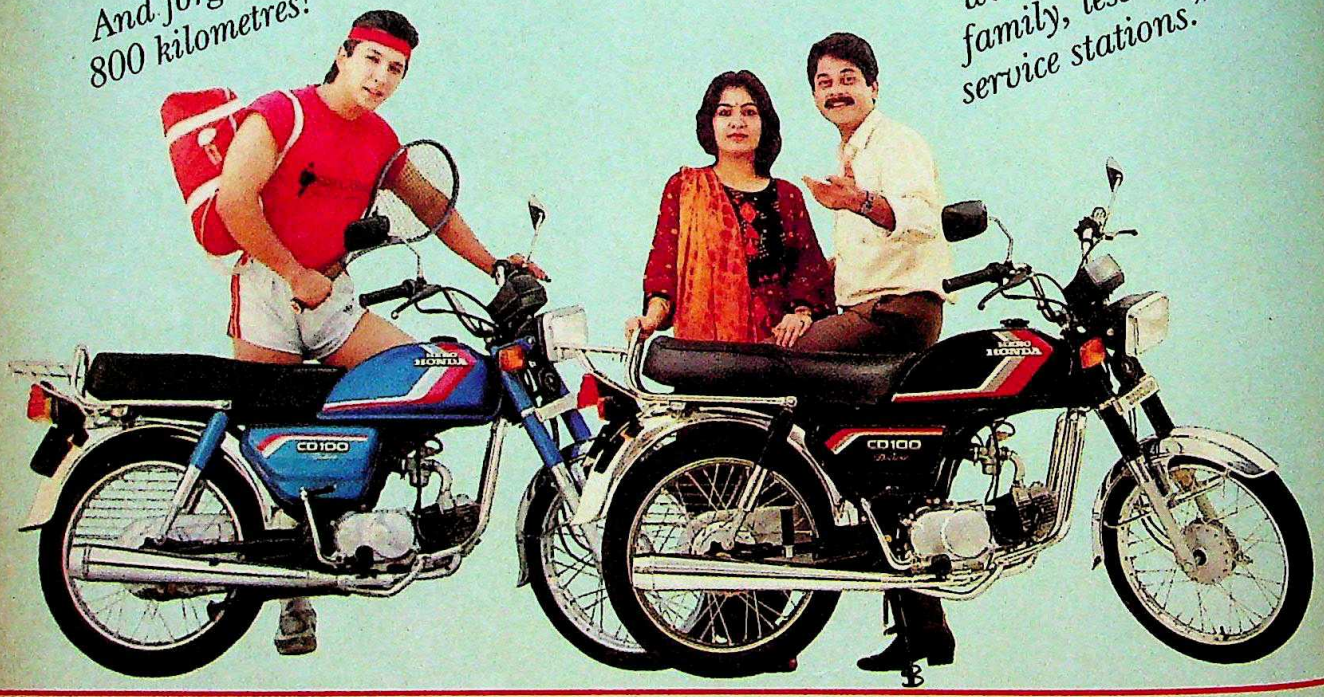

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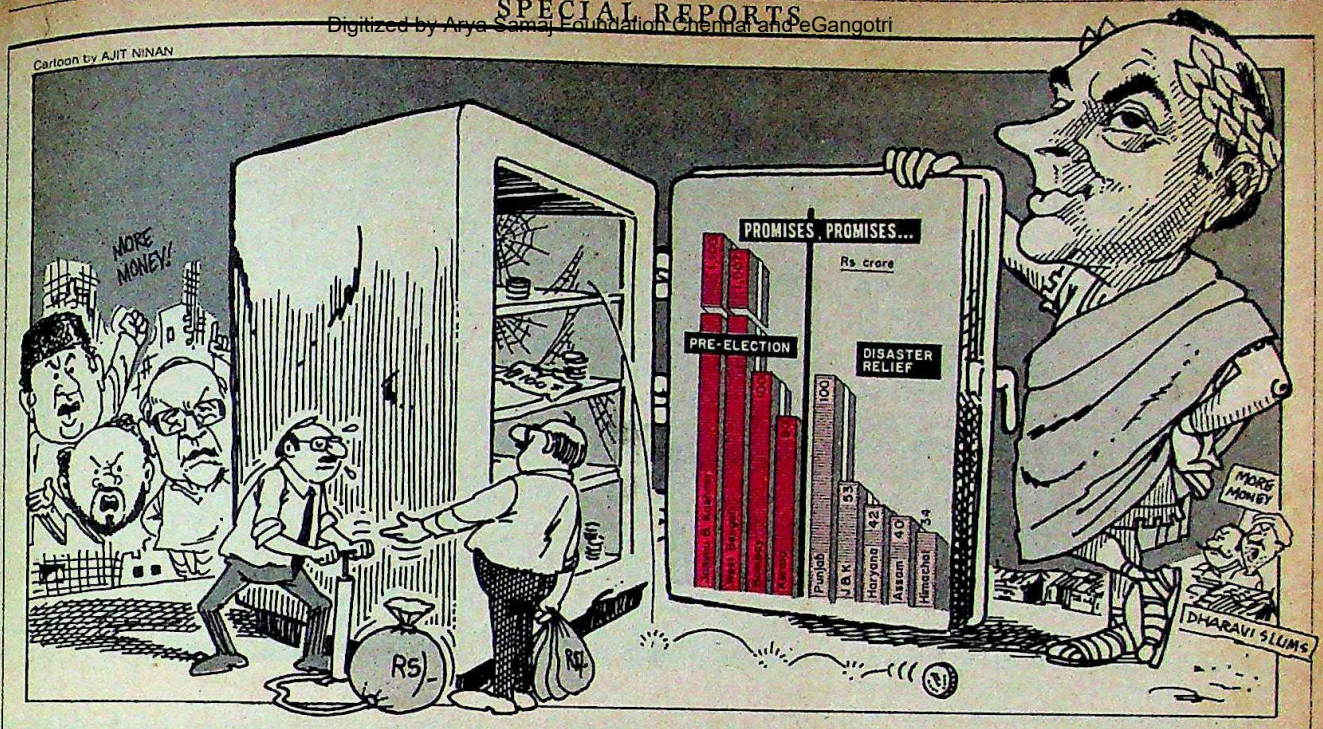

RAJIV GANDHI

Empty Promises

Promise them the moon, is the politician's attitude towards voters as elections draw near. But the prime minister has been promising the sky and the stars as well—thousands of crores of rupees for project aid and more recently, for disaster relief to states. The exercise has backfired because, in reality, there's no pot of gold at the end of Rajiv Gandhi's rainbow.

SHAWL draped over his shoulder, he looks every bit the Roman senator in a toga. The next action can be predicted. First comes the aerial survey in an IAF plane or a helicopter. He sits, eyes glued to the window, while aides identify areas below on a map. Then the landing on an airstrip, created specially for the purpose, cursory greetings to the state's chief minister, sarcastic questions directed at officials. Finally the climax: at a gathering telecast countrywide, Rajiv Gandhi magnanimously announces an impressive relief package. Applause.

The announcements have come in quick succession: Rs 40 crore for Assam, Rs 53 crore for Jammu & Kashmir, Rs 100 crore for Punjab, Rs 42 crore for Haryana, Rs 34 crore for Himachal Pradesh. Since September, Rajiv Gandhi has announced disaster relief packages worth nearly Rs 270 crore. The figure is bound to grow.

So will inconvenient questions. India has a well-defined system for assessing damage caused by calamities. But so arbitrary is the prime minister's style of functioning that what should normally be routine announcements are perceptibly tainted with motives. When Rajiv visited Assam in mid-September, there was considerable bickering between him and Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta over the amount of relief assistance. The prime minister announced a sum of Rs 40 crore, much less than the Rs 96-crore demanded as direct relief besides Rs 700-odd crore for rehabilitation and renovation of damaged assets.

The story was quite different when Rajiv announced a flood relief package of Rs 100 crore for Punjab on October 15. The logic behind the gift was not clear, but the motive was. Punjab has already been a significant recipient of the Centre's generosity by way of rescheduled "special" loans amounting to many hundred crores. While there may be economic justification in favouring a state that supplies the bulk of the country's surplus foodgrain, the point is that the intensity of the calamity was equally severe in both Punjab and Assam. Clearly, the largesse given to Punjab was meant for more than just flood relief. It was another salvo in his "peace offensive" in the troubled state.

With such transparently arbitrary decision-making, it is not surprising that many state governments are questioning the validity of the prime minister's gestures. Particularly when much of this relief should come as a matter of routine.

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Says an official representative of an opposition-ruled state: "It's our money, after all. The Centre is not doing us a great favour by advancing the disbursement of annual plan funds."

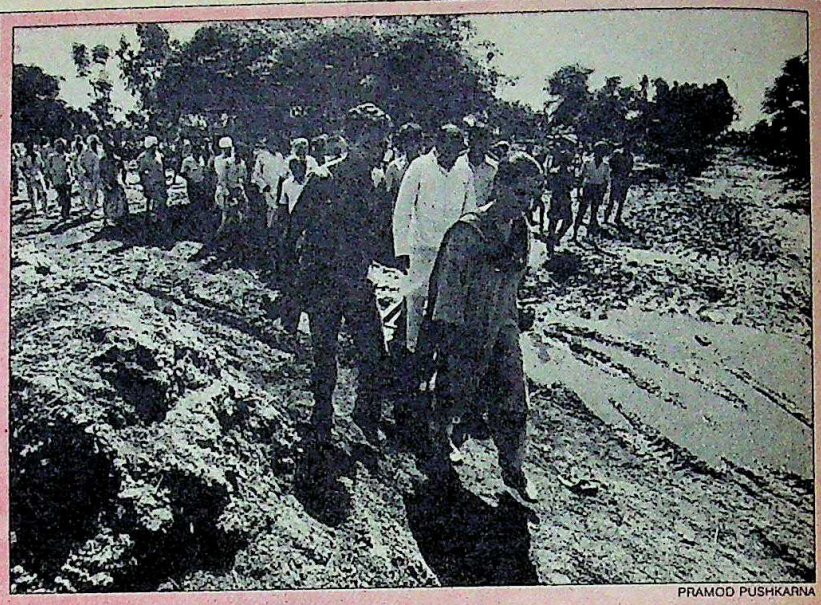
Besides relief packages, Rajiv had announced aid and loans to several states on the eve of elections. At first sight, these figures look impressive. For some states they are bonanzas. But others have discovered, to their chagrin, that the gift-wrapped packages contain a lot of fluff.

The style is characteristic. Come election time, the prime minister is out on a gift-giving binge. Before the March 1987 elections in West Bengal, Rajiv barnstormed the state and announced a grandiose package of schemes involving an investment of Rs 1,007 crore. But the figure was deceptive. Consider only two items in the package. Over half the "gift" was accounted for by a Rs 300-crore currency printing unit and a Rs 210-crore power project of the Calcutta Electric Supply Corporation (CESC). Generous? Not really. The establishment of the printing unit had been proposed by the former finance minister Pranab Mukherjee in 1984. It has still not seen the light of day. As for the power project, after a five-year delay, the CESC merely received New Delhi's go-ahead to raise Rs 210 crore.

"I am not aware of the progress made by the purely Central government schemes, but as far as schemes associated with the state Government are concerned, I can say that till four months ago, only a sum of Rs 26 crore had been received," says West Bengal Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta.

Even in pro-Congress(I) states, the picture is often not very different. In Jammu & Kashmir, for instance, after a marathon meeting with Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and his colleagues, Rajiv announced at a late night press conference nearly two years ago that a huge investment of Rs 1,100 crore would be forthcoming. Of this, the largest chunk, Rs 850 crore, was for the Dul Hasti project which is being implemented by the public sector National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC). Until last fortnight, the project hadn't been cleared formally due to differences between NHPC and the French turnkey consultant, Alsthom.

Yet another outstanding example of the prime minister's style of functioning is his off-the-cuff announcement after the Bombay session of the Congress(I) in 1985 that Rs 100 crore would be spent on improving Asia's largest slum at Dharavi. No provision for this had been made in the seventh plan. "Officials and planners had to work overtime to create a scheme to ensure that Rajiv Gandhi's promise would not be an empty one," confesses a senior bureaucrat. Almost three years later, a sum of around Rs 40 crore has been sanctioned for Dharavi. The remaining Rs 60 crore may be sanctioned later—if associations of slum dwellers and Bombay's municipal authorities can agree on how best to spend this money.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

After a visit to flood-hit Punjab in October, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi announced a generous dole of Rs 100 crore...

A clear pattern can be discerned in all this. The prime minister announces figures which are calculated to bowl one over, even if they do not actually help him win votes. But when a close analysis of the large sums is made, it is clear that they include grants for projects which never seem to arrive.

The position on the disaster relief front is only slightly different. Since the prime minister has the right to sanction ad hoc advances to state governments to help them tide over "extraordinary" crises, the funds do actually go to the states. But in the meantime, there are interminable delays forcing the states to scrape the bottom of the barrel as they wait. The catch here is not so much the money. It is—as in the case of promises of project aid to the states—politics.

"It is not as if Indira Gandhi was not in the habit of granting favours to certain states at the expense of others," says an academic in a government organisation. "It is just that she did it a bit more discreetly." For example, she was not expected to make the kind of somersault Rajiv Gandhi did in the case of Kerala.

In 1985-86, Kerala was one of the favoured few to receive additional Central relief assistance (Rs 15.54 crore) over and above the sanctioned ceiling of Rs 134.79 crore. The party in power in the state then? The Congress(I), of course. The favoured status was lost rudely after the left parties were elected in Kerala. Before the elections, the prime minister had announced a pretty-looking package of Rs 80 crore for the development of fishing harbours meant for mechanised trawlers. The new government decided to lay more emphasis on facilities for traditional fishermen instead of the more affluent owners of trawlers. It turned out to be a good excuse to withhold funds and little more was heard about the Rs 80-crore harbour development scheme.

Political favouritism aside, the question arises: where does the money for relief programmes come from? The 1988-89 budget estimate for disaster relief is Rs 600 crore and it is certain that this figure will be exceeded, as has happened in earlier years. What then? "If necessary, a supplementary demand for grants will be placed before Parliament in the 1989 budget session," says S.R. Singh, additional sec-

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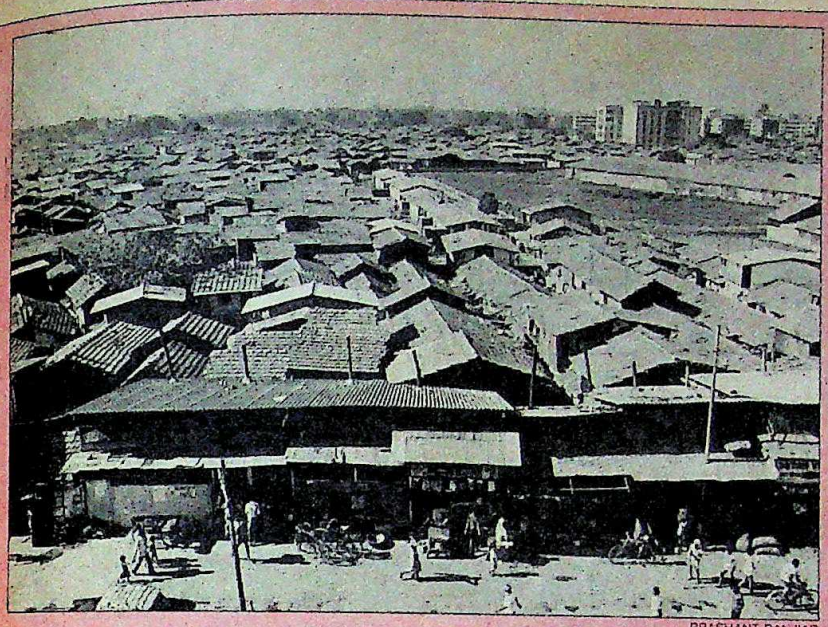

PRASHANT PANJIAR

...But for the slum dwellers of Dharavi, Bombay, much of the Rs 100 crore he promised nearly three years ago is yet to arrive.

retary (expenditure) in the Ministry of Finance. This means that, in order to finance the relief programmes, the Central Government will end up printing more currency notes and the national debt will go up.

On September 19 last year, the Government imposed a "drought surcharge" on direct and indirect taxes, besides air and first class railway travel. The aim was to raise an additional Rs 550 crore by the end of March this year. Finance Secretary S. Venkitaramanan said that the Central Government needed around Rs 1,300 crore to fund relief operations over and above the Rs 620 crore provided for in last year's budget. Besides the Rs 550 crore raised by imposing the surcharge, the Government also intended saving Rs 650 crore through austerity measures. There was another source of finance though the Government did not publicise it. During the fiscal year 1987-88, it had received over Rs 600 crore as foreign aid for drought relief.

Even though the main financial responsibility for alleviating distress caused by natural calamities is supposed to rest with the state governments, the reality is that their coffers are woefully inadequate. So they must rely on the Centre for grants of what is known as "margin money" fixed by the Finance Commission, half of which has to be contributed by the respective state government.

The margin money is never enough, especially when the calamity is severe. And this is precisely why so many have begun to accuse the prime minister of politicking for publicity when he announces—arbitrarily—that so many hundred crores will be made available to a certain state visited by natural disaster.

INTERESTINGLY, the process of determining how much assistance a state will be provided often occurs after the prime minister has made his generous promises. It is a tortuous bureaucratic procedure under which Central study teams survey the areas and submit reports which are then considered by a high-level committee on relief. The committee later lays down ceilings on expenditure specifying what is available under plan and non-plan heads.

"There is nothing extra-legal about the prime minister announcing ad hoc relief packages to states," notes Raja Chelliah, member, Planning Commission. "It is up to the people and Parliament to judge whether some states are getting more or less than what they should." Chelliah may be right but what cannot be ignored is that often when the prime minister makes promises, he is not aware of, or prefers to ignore, financial realities.

While the institutional procedure for assessment of damage and disbursement of relief is fairly well-defined—"to avoid charges of arbitrary behaviour", in the words of a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture—the same cannot be said about the mechanism to monitor the way in which relief funds are actually spent. In this context, it is worth quoting a letter written three years ago by Rajiv Gandhi himself to the then agriculture minister Buta Singh: "... is it not the time to examine closely the kind of projects on which money given for drought (relief) is spent? The beneficiaries of the present-day programme appear to be only contractors and civil servants." Such concern must be applauded. But has anything been done?

"A Central monitoring cell has been functioning in the Agriculture Ministry since December 1985, but the states usually resent any interference in what is seen to be their area of operations," the Agriculture Ministry official remarks. The ministry's own statistics reveal a yawning gap between what the states demand and what they actually receive. One reason is that state governments direct district magistrates or collectors to inflate their assessment of the damage caused by calamities so that they will then receive a "reasonable" amount from the Centre. "When we want a pistol, we ask for a cannon," quips a representative of a state government.

In 1987-88, all the states put together asked for drought relief assistance of Rs 10,268 crore; they got Rs 1,444 crore. For flood relief, the states asked the Centre for Rs 2,266 crore; they received only Rs 312 crore. In the previous year, the states got 12.8 per cent and 10.8 per cent of their combined demands for drought and flood relief respectively.

But if the states are guilty of inflating their requirements and inefficient in utilising relief funds, the Centre can hardly be exonerated of the charge of politicising the issue of relief or economic aid packages. Very few today believe the prime minister when he promises the moon, not even the chief ministers of states who owe allegiance to him. The argument that he is doing what he is for short-term political gain is not really correct. As the example of West Bengal shows, his promises have made little impact on the electorate.

For whose benefit then is the farce being acted out? Few in the Congress(I) or the Central Government would be able to answer. But that is not because they do not know the answer. It is simply that no one wants to tell the emperor that he has no clothes.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA

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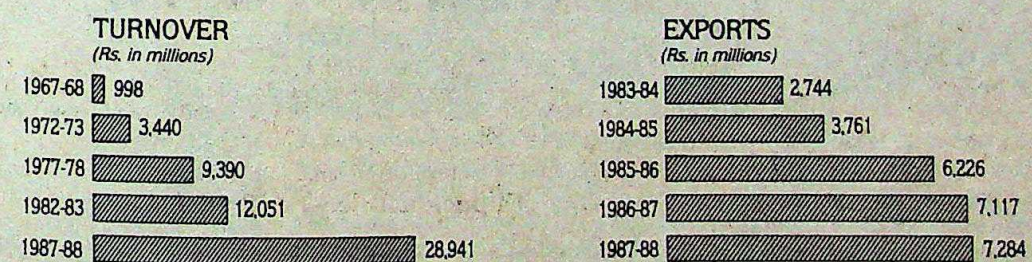

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GENERAL ELECTIONS

The Countdown Begins

The Congress(I) and the Opposition mobilise cadres

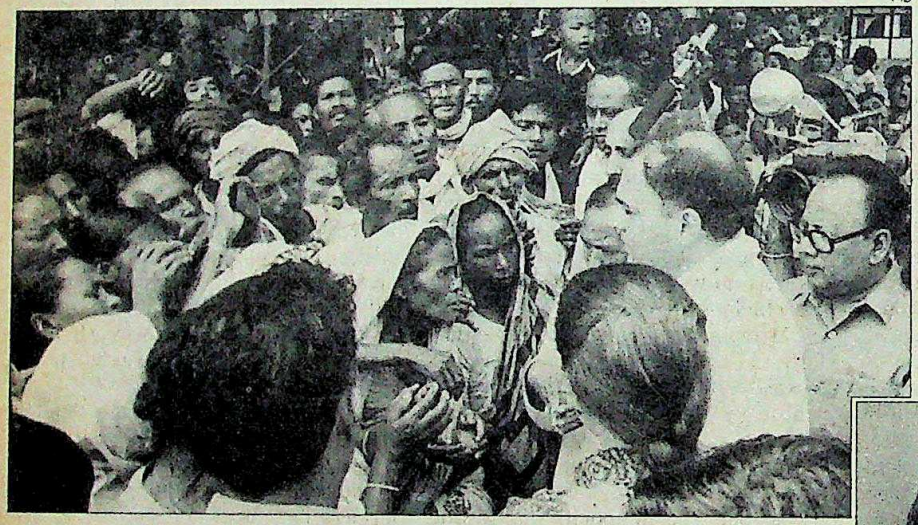
THE major political parties are girding for battle. Targets have been fixed, arsenals stored, and combat strategies readied. The prizes at stake: 542 Lok Sabha seats in December 1989. As elections go, a year is nothing, merely a fleeting political moment before the final countdown. The Congress(I) knows, and has begun to show signs of the jitters.

In a bold move last fortnight, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sacked the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) chiefs of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to shore up the party's creaky structure. He then summoned the Congress(I) Working Committee to finalise the election manifesto and unleashed Youth Congress(I) brigades to organise massive rallies in every state capital. Says Mukul Wasnik, the boyish-looking Indian Youth Congress(I) president: "Our party is prepared to meet any challenge from the Opposition."

As of now, the Congress(I) seems to be leading its opponents in terms of manpower, muscle-power and money-power. To demonstrate that the party continues to retain a mass base in the country, Congress(I) chief ministers and Central ministers were directed to ensure that more than 20 lakh people assembled in the capital on October 31.

The rally was one of the biggest organised by the party during the last four years. And the steering committee for it contained just about every Congress(I) heavyweight, from veteran partyman Umashanker Dixit to senior cabinet ministers like P.V. Narasimha Rao, Buta Singh and H.K.L. Bhagat. The railways were asked to provide over 100 special trains to bring in people from all over the country and more than a million multi-coloured posters, banners and pamphlets were printed for distribution among the participants. The estimated cost of it all: a modest Rs 5 crore.

PIB



Rajiv during a visit to Assam; and V.P. Singh: tough decisions

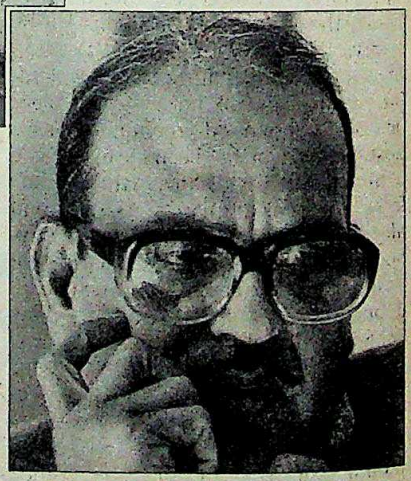
The rally was the culmination of over a dozen nation-wide Youth Congress(I) and Congress(I) Sewa Dal rallies. Addressed by senior Union ministers, chief ministers and Youth Congress(I) leaders, these rallies were aimed at mobilising the youth. The Sewa Dal meetings were meant to enrol and activate workers and teach them how to manage polling booths.

The prime minister himself is taking up the task of "reaching the people directly", as an aide put it. On the advice of his public relations managers he has agreed to cover the states himself and address three to five meetings a day. The strategy is to sell Rajiv as the only person who can provide a stable and strong government at the Centre. Said Ahmed Patel, former Gujarat PCC(I) president: "We have Rajivji who is young, clear-headed and acceptable to everybody in the country. Only he represents the pulse of the people."

But Rajiv cannot be sold in isolation. Also needed are thrills and frills and sugar-coated slogans. The first frill: a recommendation from the Congress(I) Working Committee—a bone thrown to the youth—that the voting age be lowered from 21 to 18. Not quite good enough. The Opposition had already made the demand earlier.

Bankrupt of original ideas, the party turned to the two old faithfuls—Doordarshan and All India Radio—to spread their word shamelessly. And so television viewers last month were overdosed with Rajiv and Sonia, an average of five to 10 minutes a day. Rajiv in Punjabland, walking amid beturbaned gentlemen, with Sonia, a Jat Sikhni in salwar kameez, a dutiful step behind. Then a 20-minute special report during prime time: Rajiv in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir; mixing and chatting with the masses in colloquial Hindustani. A man, as his grandfather was, of the masses.

The Congress(I) is ahead in manpower, muscle-power, and money-power. But the Opposition is willing to accept the challenge.



If Rajiv was on an image-improving binge, the Opposition was also in a mood

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to accept the challenge. With Chandra Shekhar more or less reconciled to the formation of the Janata Dal there was for the first time a semblance of opposition unity the like of which has not been seen since 1977. Said Harikesh Bahadur, general secretary of the Janata Party: "Our top leaders have sorted out their minor differences and misunderstandings. We are committed to throwing Rajiv Gandhi out by organising massive protest rallies against his corrupt government."

Typically, it was left to the maverick Jat from Haryana to fire the first electoral salvo. Convinced as he is that only mass contact programmes can defeat the Congress(I), Chief Minister Devi Lal was whirlwind-touring the entire Hindi belt to organise massive opposition rallies in every Congress(I) stronghold. Each to be addressed by opposition superstar Vishwanath Pratap Singh.

V.P. Singh, meanwhile, is busy with internal party matters, the most vexing of which has been to arrive at an agreement over the election of office-bearers. The deadline has been fixed for November 11. This has become an important test of Singh's leadership abilities. A bungle-up could cause significant erosion in his authority. But beams a confident Singh: "None of us is fighting for office, but for a cause. It is the collective leadership which will finally emerge."

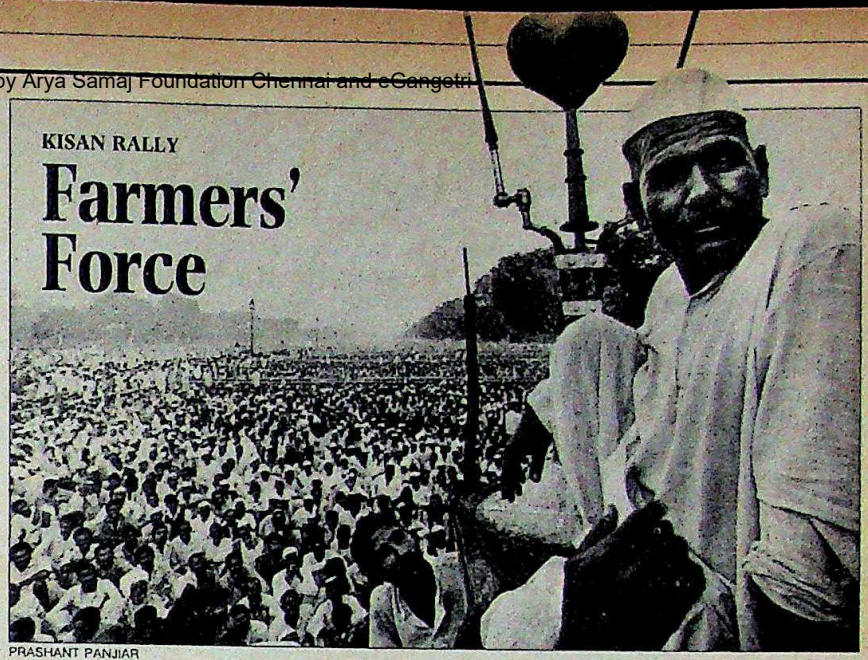
Singh's task has become difficult because of the continuous skirmishing between the two Lok Dal factions led by Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna and Devi Lal. In a pre-emptive move last fortnight, Bahuguna removed Sharad Yadav, a fiery pro-Devi Lal general secretary from his post. Yadav, who has been the main force behind the attempts to merge the factions, feels: "The rank and file of the Lok Dal and all other parties want merger and anybody who opposes it at this juncture will be doing it at the cost of his own political doom."

Singh has also to sort out relations with the communists and the BJP with whom his coalition hopes to reach electoral alliances. While the communists have welcomed the formation of the Janata Dal, the BJP has maintained silence.

The immediate task before both the ruling party and the Opposition is not just the wooing of public opinion through nation-wide rallies. It is, rather, which party can present itself as a cohesive and credible organisation capable of delivering not slogans but concrete economic and social benefits. So far, it appears, neither fits that bill. —PRABHU CHAWLA

KISAN RALLY

Farmers' Force



PRASHANT PANJIAR

Tikait at the kisan rally held at the Boat Club: charismatic

WATCH out India, here comes Bharat. The long-neglected rural hinterland of the country is fast awakening to the rising disparity between town and village. Taunted constantly by images on colour TV, the farmer has had enough. "Our forefathers must have been fools or positively dim-witted that they got exploited so long," says 35-year-old Krishi Pal of village Saini near Meerut. "We will not rest till we have changed things for our children."

Sentiments such as his dominated last fortnight as tens of thousands of farmers poured onto the lush lawns of the Boat Club in New Delhi. Their gaunt, weather-beaten faces, sacks of food and utensils, bundles of hay for bedding, and the thousands of overloaded tractors dramatically drove home their point, contrasting sharply with the surrounding grandeur of what the British called the Imperial Vista.

The focus of this realisation is the charismatic, though earthy, Mahendra Singh Tikait. His movement for farmers' rights has gradually grown over the past couple of years, coming to a head last February, when an estimated 80,000 farmers laid siege to the Meerut district magistrate's office, demanding better farm prices and waiver of electricity bills. The Government did not budge. To everyone's surprise, after 25 days, Tikait suddenly told the determined farmers to go home. But the demands were not dropped.

"Who says I didn't achieve anything?" he now asks. "We brought to light the fact that farmers can unite to fight for their rights." Tikait seems in no hurry to lap up short term gains. This time he was looking for a larger unity of farmers across the country. Representatives from as many as 14 states came, though other farmers' leaders like Sharad Joshi did not show up as expected. The bulk of the lakhs of farmers at the October 25 rally was from Tikait's own belt, western Uttar Pradesh.

The demands mainly referred to sugarcane and wheat procurement prices. Wheat had been bought from farmers at Rs 166 per quintal. It was selling in Delhi for Rs 275, while flour was going for Rs 325. "Who gets the difference?" asked one of Tikait's lieutenants. Another point which really rankles is electricity bills. Electricity is more expensive in Uttar Pradesh than in neighbouring states and farmers feel since none of the much-touted drought relief reached them last year, they should at least be subsidised through free electricity.

Negotiations got under way between an 11-member farmers' team and ministers such as Ram Niwas Mirdha and Shyam Lal Yadav. There was pressure to settle before October 31, the day of the Congress(I) rally by exactly the same (rural) constituency right there at Boat Club that day.

Tikait seemed to be enjoying the Government's discomfiture. "I don't know how long the farmers will stay. They are not hired," said Tikait. Nor was he playing the Opposition's game. He, like his followers, does not trust politicians. "Who knows, V.P. Singh might turn out the same way?" In any case, he added, "We don't want just a change of government. We want to change heaven and earth."

—DAVID DEVADAS

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ASSAM

Fighting Back

Mahanta reshuffles ministry

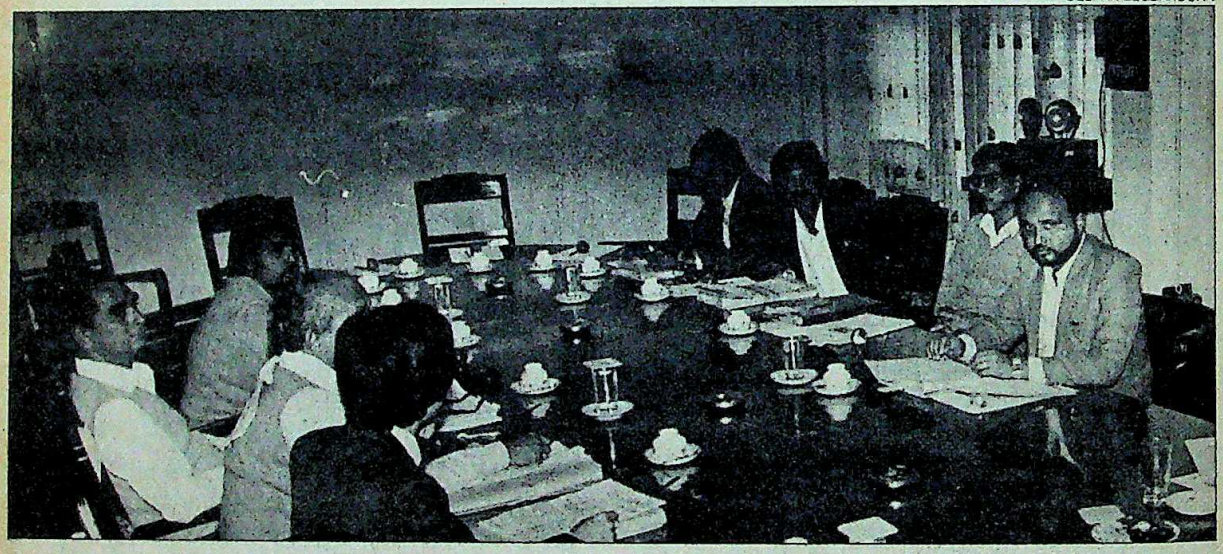
FINALLY, Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta stood up and decided to call a halt to the show. For 33 months the youngest state chief in the country had not shown the spine and sense of purpose that had marked his leadership of the historic Assam students' agitation. For 33 months charges of ineptitude and corruption had plagued his ministry; the headiness of moral and electoral victory giving way rapidly to the tedium and turpitude of governance. Then, on the morning of October 22, Mahanta sought and obtained the resignation of 25 of his 27 ministers. Later the same day, it was announced that Mahanta had dropped 12 of them, five being of cabinet rank.

The act was essentially an overdue display of strategy. The ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had in recent months become the target of criticism by even its most committed supporters. Its popularity had plummeted with the Assamese people who had swept them—a mere band of students—to power. But most critical of all were the posturings of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) which had comprised the ground swell of the AGP's strength. The students' group had begun castigating the Government for widespread corruption, alleging it had involved itself in controversies that brought shame to the party. That was not all. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and master strategists like Union Minister of State for Home Santosh Mohan Deb had, with frequent visits and scathing criticism, been making inroads into the AGP citadel. With elections round the corner, it would have been fatal for Mahanta to ignore the signs.

The moment of crisis had, in fact, come two months earlier when Mahanta, in a moment of desperation, had sent in his resignation to the party declaring that he had failed to live up to the promises made by the AGP when it assumed power. Though he then allowed the party to persuade him to withdraw his resignation, the young chief minister made it clear that from now on it was up to each minister to defend himself against charges of corruption. Home Minister Bhrigu Phukan similarly resigned and retracted. The second most important leader of the party, Phukan declared that he too was disillusioned with the way the Government was being run, and it pained him to see so many youngsters interested only in making easy money. A meeting of the AGP Legislature Party was summoned at Guwahati on August 12 and, after admitting it had lost direction, it authorised Mahanta, Phukan and Public Works Department Minister Atul Bora to undertake changes, however drastic. To facilitate this, it was decided that all the ministers, barring these three, would submit their resignations.

Consequently, on the morning of October 22, all the ministers were summoned to the Janata Bhawan in Dispur and asked to resign. Party sources say that, barring Biraj Sarma, minister for food and civil supplies, everyone did so immediately. Sarma, apparently, had to be reassured of his reappointment before he put in his resignation. The same evening, Governor Bhishma Narain Singh announced that he had accepted the resignation of five cabinet ministers and seven others. The strength of the reconstituted ministry had also been reduced to 23 from 28. Among the dropped heavy weights were Digen Bora, industries minister, Biraj Sarma, Lalit Rajkhowa, power and transport minister, Chandra Mohan Patowary, health minister, Thaneshwar Boro, revenue minister, and Nagen Sarma, veterinary minister. A notable entrant was Joynath Sarma, the party whip in the Assembly.

DEEPAK BEGBAROOAH



Mahanta (extreme right) at a cabinet meeting: weeding operations

Political observers interpreted the move as a spring-cleaning exercise before the polls. But in all likelihood, it was much more. Party insiders saw it as a bold move aimed at telling the people that the AGP was serious about its tasks, and had the courage to punish those who had erred or not measured up, thus ensuring its survival. The reshuffle was also an attempt to placate the aggressive AASU. Yet the effort was to keep it from dimensions that could precipitate a split in the party. The soft-spoken Mahanta, typically, refused to comment, stating that it was for observers to make their deductions. These were clear: the time had come to start strapping on the boots for the electoral race.

—RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

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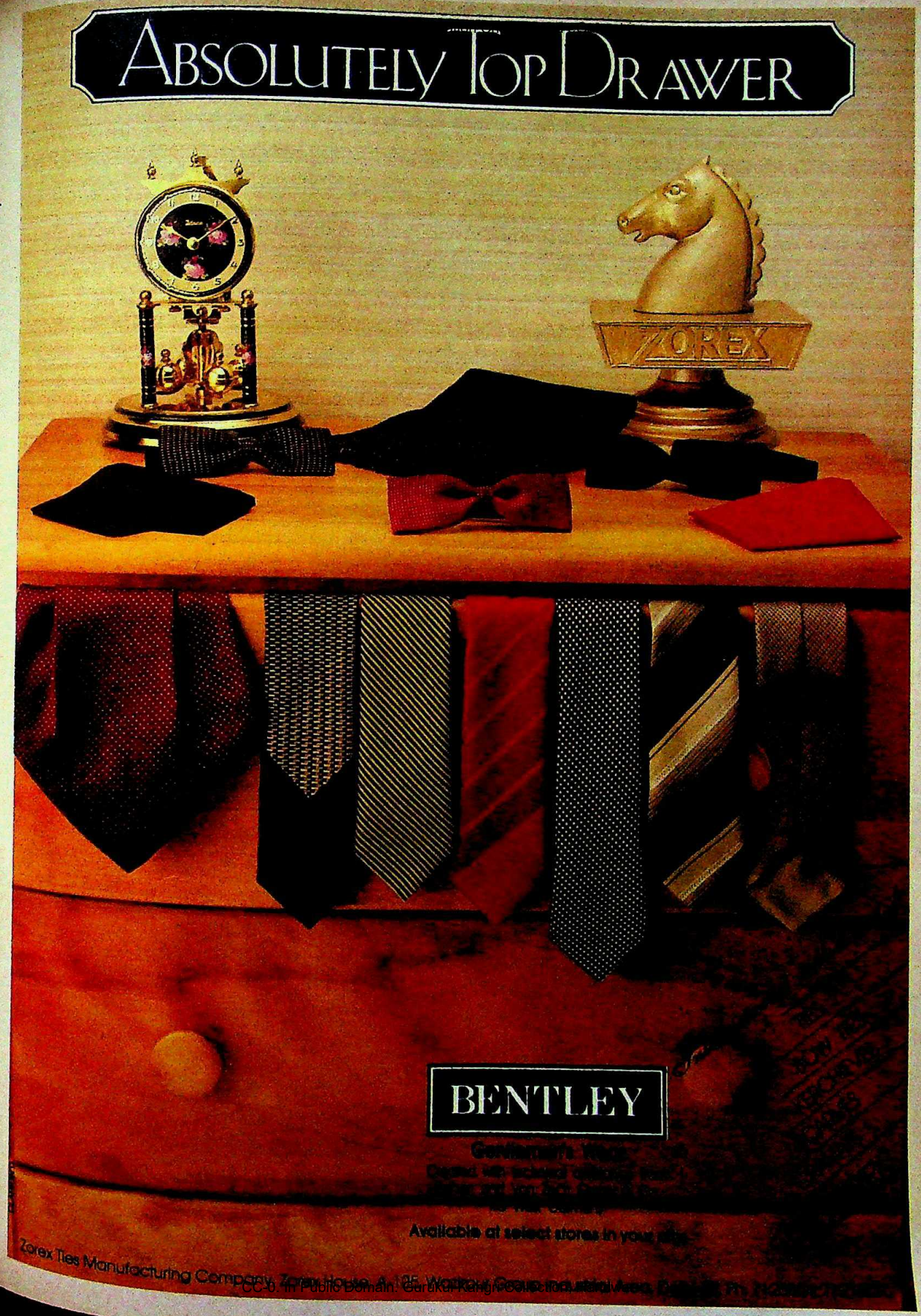

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"What did you buy at Antwerp?" he asked. "Picture postcards. And some diamonds," she said. "Here's to the postcards." They laugh. They charm.

The Silk People

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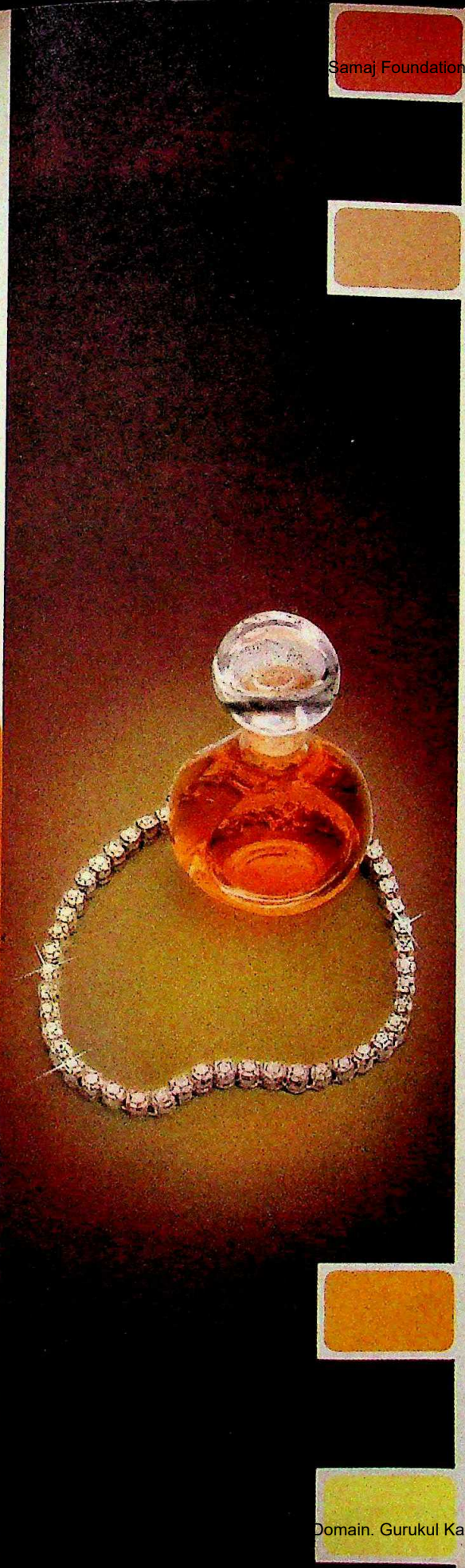

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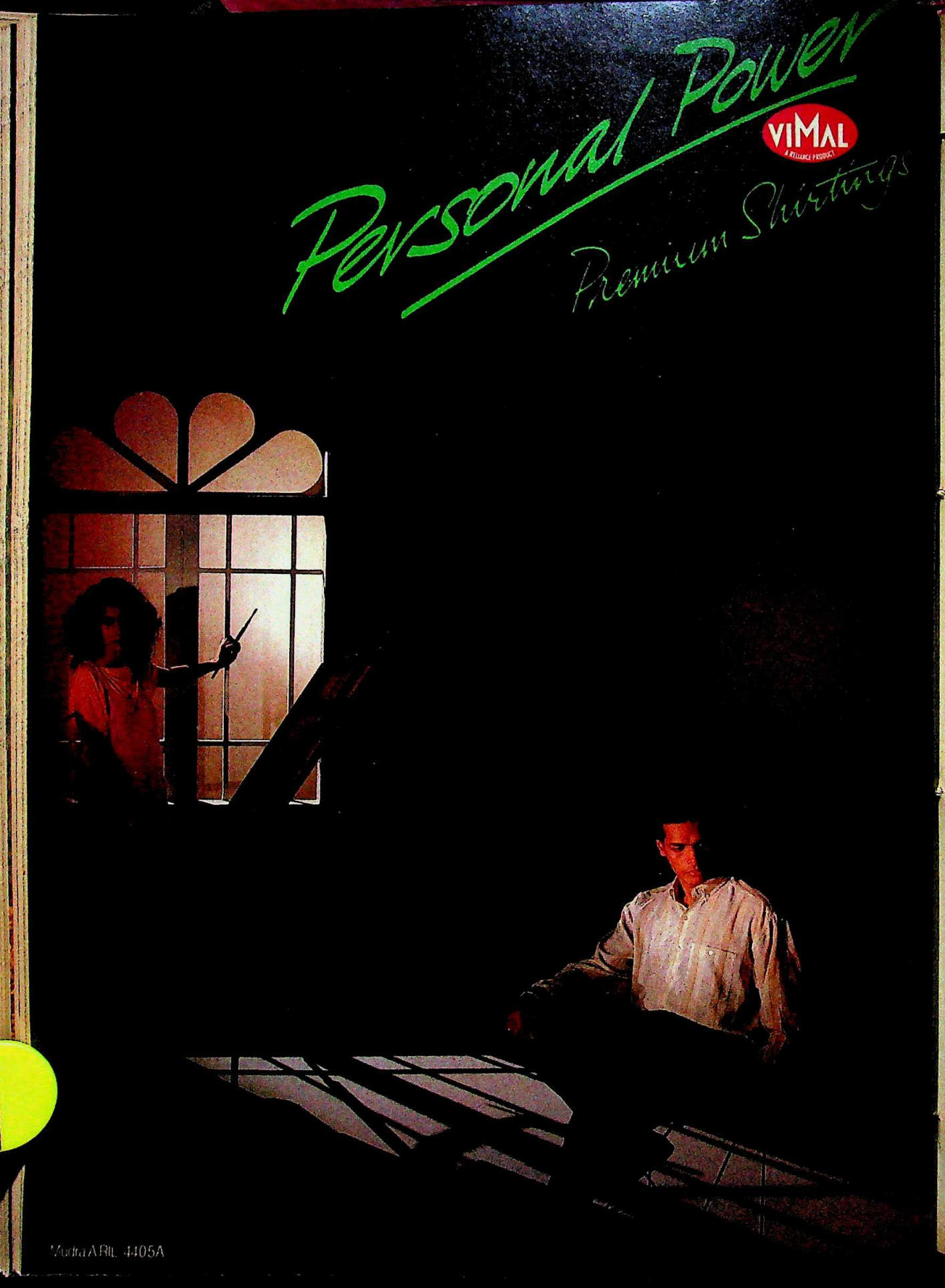

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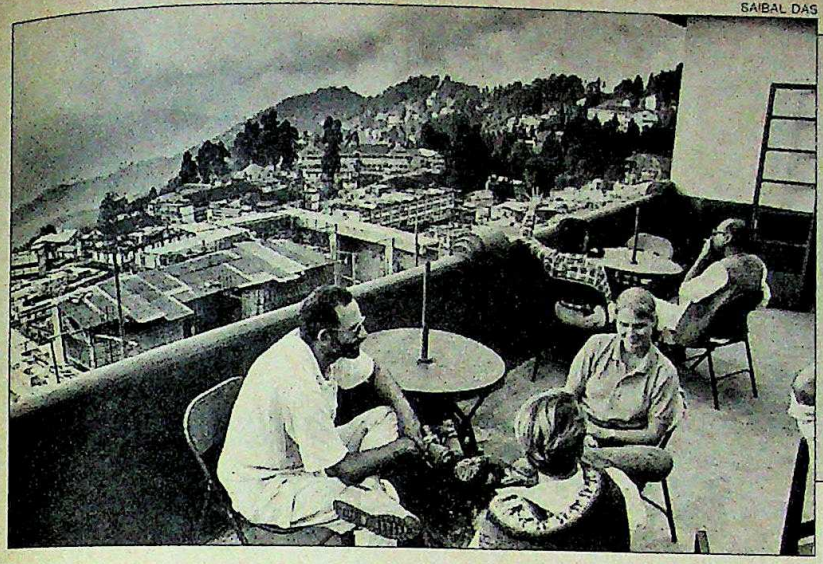
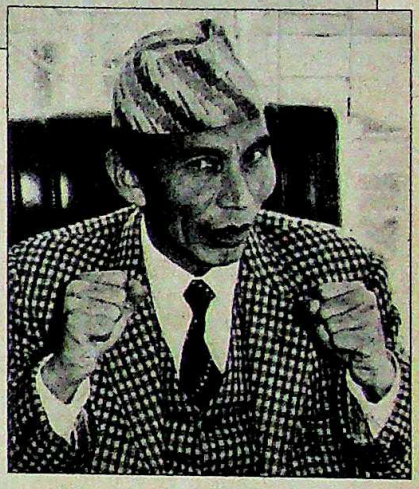
SAIBAL DAS



The countenances of rugged and hard-faced militants no longer frighten, but crack into wide smiles. "Keep on coming," they seem to urge tourists. "You are our bread and butter."

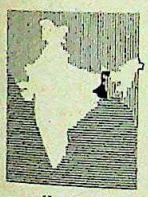


Tourists relax on hotel terrace (above, left); and Ghising: rediscovered faith

DARJEELING

Return to Peace

After the accord, a hint of confidence and tourists



THE queen, who for 27 long months seemed destined to die, has been resurrected. Born again, she is a fetching princess, wooing visitors with a charm never excelled before. Darjeeling, the first summer capital of the Englishman in India, educational haven and obvious resort for the entire east, and lately explosive crucible for Gorkha aspirations, has come a full circle.

As tourism booms in the after glow of the Darjeeling accord, a sense of peace and confidence is returning to the pine-clad hills. Says a relaxed-looking Subhas Ghising, the president of the erstwhile militant Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF): "We are happy, very happy. We have got our identity. We will ensure that Darjeeling is not a burden on anyone." The surest way to do that, he knows, is to ensure that the tourist rediscovers his faith in the hill town and in the pacifism of its people. So, the GNLF organised a mammoth Durga puja celebration right on the Mall. And the countenances of rugged and hard-faced militants no longer frighten, but crack into wide smiles. "Keep on coming," they seem to urge. "You are our bread and butter."

But one does not need to look at those wide smiles to realise that the queen is once again beginning to glow in all its splendour. All around, the proof swamps the senses. The tourists swell the Mall and Chowk bazaar like yesteryears, the hotels and rest-houses fill themselves to bursting, and if one is up before the crack of dawn to watch the sun rise at Tiger Hill, one is not alone but part of a huge crowd that has transported itself there, crammed in more than 70 landrovers. Contrast this with the fear and desertion that had enveloped the hill town in 27 months of the Gorkha agitation, and the change is overwhelming. Says the gallery-clerk of the Tiger Hill observatory: "During the agitation there would just about be the odd jeep of foreigners."

The memory of the agitation is so daunting that most shopkeepers detest talking about 'those dark days', when business had collapsed and shops opened for a few hours every morning. At the time, of the 120 hotels in the hill-station, no more than half a dozen had remained functional. But today it is the hoteliers who are enjoying the biggest boom. Every hotel is undertaking renovations and repairs, touching up the paint and installing geysers. As if to make up for lost time, several hotels have hiked rates by over 150 per cent; and yet the tourists are rushing in. The Elgin Hotel management admitted: "Our business in September was more than what we had in any month during the last 10 years." The owners of the 150-odd holiday homes in the town are also cheery with optimism, for several companies are reconsidering hiring their premises for use of employees.

The tourist influx, as in the past, has been dominated by Bengalis vacationing at puja time. But the agitation has bred attitudinal changes. There are still short Gorkhas suddenly surfacing at your elbow, cajolling, "*sahib, room chahiye; mere saath aao*", while coolies stand nearby, poised to transport your luggage. But in the responses of the Bengali tourist there is a difference. No longer does he call out, '*coolie, Gorkha or durwan*' but comes up with a more respectful '*daaju bhai*' (*daaju*, too, means brother). Says Sanjib Roy, a bank officer at Calcutta: "This is my first visit to Darjeeling. Our Gorkha brothers are so sweet, sincere and honest that I find it difficult to believe whatever I have been reading in the press all these months."

The overnight improvement in the situation has flummoxed several others,

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including Debi Prasad Patra, the district magistrate. He points out: "We have to take up the rebuilding of infrastructure for tourists on a war-footing because almost all the dak bungalows and tourist lodges were either burnt or destroyed during the agitation period." With the Tourism Department expecting a rise of 200 per cent in tourist traffic, those in the administration, justifiably, express fears about Darjeeling's infrastructural weaknesses. Both the town's water supply system and street lighting need comprehensive overhauling.

But these are the lesser problems. The greater is to ensure that the accord proves a long-term solution. At the moment all is hunky-dory. Perhaps, mainly because Ghising is happy. His popularity has sky-rocketed, his word has become virtual law, and the various factions of the GNLF are solidly ranged behind him. The support for him is fanatic, and embraces the entire Gorkha populace of the hill areas.

But this cohesion also makes for an autocratic streak. Says Thupden Bhutia, notorious Gorkha Volunteer Cell (GVC) leader, who had eluded arrest on a number of occasions: "The man (Ghising) who opened our eyes will have to run the council. He is our master and we will not tolerate any challenge to his leadership in the hills, even from the CPI(M)." This bravura displays itself in condescension, as dressed in army fatigues, dark glasses, headbands and long hair, GVC veterans saunter around town, sporting big 'No Problems' badges on their jackets.

Not surprising then, that such an attitude should spawn detractors. Says Madan Tamang of Pranta Parishad: "There is peace today because Ghising is being pampered by all of you—the media, CPI(M), and the Congress(I). No one can dare challenge him or criticise him, not even Jyoti Basu. We cannot be sure of this peace unless the inner fear of everyone is wiped out and democracy is restored." People are also viewing the increasing love between the CPI(M) and the GNLF suspiciously. The former has been making unexpected concessions. The CPI(M) agreed to surrender arms and rehabilitate GNLF cadres though the accord clearly stated that "the GNLF will surrender arms and the CPI(M) cadres will be rehabilitated". They also did not object to Ghising using a Gorkhaland letter-head in his first communication with the district administration. Local CPI(M) leaders admit they have been directed to refrain from criticising any of the Gorkha leaders. So, for the moment, despite muted resentment, peace prevails, and militants from the opposing cadres even pose together for friendly photographs. It remains to be seen if such a cameo can be reconstructed once the council elections arrive in December.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

SAIBAL DAS

GNLF men giving up their arms: persisting doubts

ARMS SURRENDER

Controversial Catch

THE Darjeeling arms surrender programme was billed as the biggest ever in India. In the event, it also turned out to be the most controversial. It began with the signing of the Darjeeling accord on August 22, which stated that the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) militants would surrender all their arms at the earliest. Later, the Gorkha supremo, Subhas Ghising, shrewdly insisted that the CPI(M) cadres surrender arms too. He told CPI(M) MP Anand Pathak that arms with any cadre were dangerous, and thus procured his consent.

With symbolic significance, on October 2, Gandhi Jayanti day, the fortnight-long arms surrender began in Darjeeling. The authorities were taken aback to see the enormous cache of arms unearthed. On the first day, more than 2,500 militants, including women, surrendered arms. Thereafter, as laid down by Ghising, different areas surrendered arms on different days. Garlanded with flowers, the weapons included two Sten guns, nearly a dozen foreign-made pistols, several looted single- and double-barrel guns, thousands of improvised pipe-guns, revolvers, mine-blasting materials, bombs, bomb-launchers nicknamed "bofors", and explosive materials. Doordarshan gave the surrender wide publicity and the effort was made to foster the impression that every weapon in the hills had been brought out into the open. Said Ghising: "I have kept my word and surrendered all arms." However, he complained that CPI(M) cadres of Bijonbari and Goke areas of the district had not yet reciprocated.

Despite the large size of the cache, virtually everyone continues to doubt if it comprised the entire armoury of the hills. Said an additional superintendent of police: "Soon after the surrender was announced, a cottage industry sprang up in the hills for manufacturing pipe-guns that could be surrendered at the Gymkhana Club. Most of the pipe-guns surrendered did not even have a trigger or place to put in a bullet." Madan Tamang, of the Pranta Parishad, terms the surrender 'the biggest joke of the century". District Magistrate Debi Prasad Patra is, however, diplomatic. "Even if all the arms have not been surrendered, at least such a public opinion has been created in which even if someone possesses a weapon, he would be scared to use it."

Since most of the sophisticated weapons, including the two Sten guns, were surrendered by the CPI(M), the GNLF and the Congress(I) have been kicking up a fuss, claiming that the left party has always followed a policy of eliminating its opponents. The former PCC(I) president, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, also called upon the West Bengal Governor, Nurul Hasan, to take action and wrote to Union Home Minister Buta Singh, informing him of the CPI(M)'s fascist tendencies.

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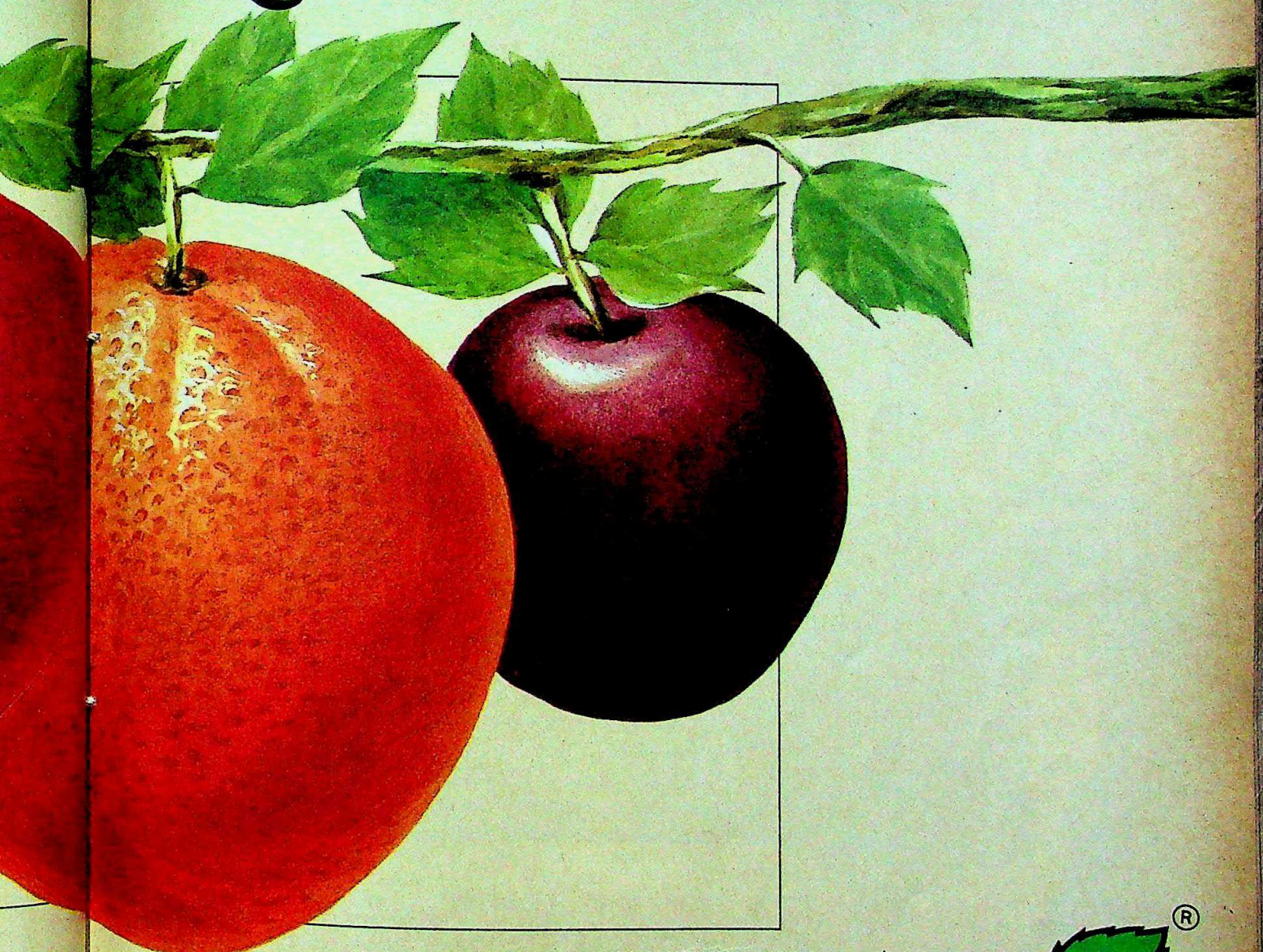

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PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

DCM

Political Imbroglio

Dispute over mill closure reaches explosive levels

DCM textile unit (top); Jag Pravesh Chandra (above left); Romesh Bhandari

POLITICAL tension was at its crackling best in Delhi last fortnight. The days were fast ticking by for the administration to finally decide whether it would allow the Rs 518-crore DCM Ltd textile mills to close down. A straight enough decision on the face of it, the closure was blocked by local politicians. It was a test case for them: Should owners of industrial units in metropolitan cities be allowed the huge profits of estate redevelopment? That was not the only test. The city's top authorities battled over who would have the last word. While Lt-Governor Romesh Bhandari was inclined to allow the closure, Chief Executive Councillor Jag Pravesh Chandra was adamant. "I will resign if the mill closes," said he.

The political fall-out could be immense. If this mill were to shut, the nearby Birla mills might follow suit, along with others in Bombay and Ahmedabad. While city planners would be all for such closures, workers might be upset. With elections looming large, this could be politically expensive.

DCM's owners, the beleaguered Shri Ram family, could only wait with bated breath for the political imbroglio to sort itself out. Their 99-year-old mill was totting up fresh losses every day (Rs 6.26 crore in 1986-87). Having reached an agreement with almost all the workers and drawn up plans for residential and commercial flats, they were set to go.

They could take nothing for granted, though. They had seen a series of false starts through this decade. It began on June 1, 1981, when the administration sent the company an urgent letter pointing out that under the 1961 master plan, the mill must shift. The statutory plan had given two decades for implementation and time was almost up. The management was not unwilling. The unit's profitability having plummeted, this was a golden chance to open a modernised plant elsewhere, while getting a builder in to redevelop the 63 acres in the heart of town. The project would be worth a huge sum, estimates varying from Rs 200 crore to Rs 500 crore.

At first, things went well enough. The project was cleared by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in 1983 and under the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act by 1984. But 1985 brought what a company executive calls "a bombshell". The administration refused to allow closure under the Industrial Disputes Act, to protect the workers from losing their jobs. As if that was not enough, a shrill anti-closure chorus on city streets and in Parliament ended in withdrawal of the DDA clearance too in mid-86. Oddly enough, that order cited the other refusal as a reason.

Meanwhile, the company generously settled with the host of workers' unions. They would pay Rs 55 crore more than the Rs 15 crore statutorily due as provident fund, gratuity, etc. In a smart move, the management turned the 6,000 workers from opponents to vociferous supporters of the project by making the settlement contingent on all the necessary government sanctions.

But the politicians would not give up. The moot point, after all, is the colossal value of the land. And DCM is a test case not only for Delhi but also for more industrialised cities like Ahmedabad, Bombay and Calcutta. Urban land prices have so zoomed that many industrialists would profit by settling with their workers, shifting their industry out of the city and redeveloping. Said a senior Delhi politician: "If this is allowed, the country's entire industry will crumble."

The matter could also become a potent electoral issue among the large rural electorate along Delhi's periphery. Agricultural land there has generally been acquired by the DDA for a song and redevelopment has been the DDA's prerogative rather than that of the original owners. When politicians demanded take-over of the DCM land, however, the company argued that since they were strapped for cash, both the establishment of a new plant and their settlement with the workers were impossible unless they were allowed to redevelop the plot.

The matter went to the Delhi High Court, which ruled in May that DDA's revocation of clearance was bad in law. A special leave petition against this is now pending admission in the Supreme Court. In July, then, the high court gave the Delhi Administration 60 days to reconsider the order under the Industrial Disputes Act, since the workers were now willing. The deadline was twice extended, finally to October 31.

Lt-Governor Romesh Bhandari faced perhaps the toughest decision of his two-month term as the date approached. The matter had become so explosive that it threatened to unseat either Bhandari or Chandra along its stormy course.

—DAVID DEVADAS

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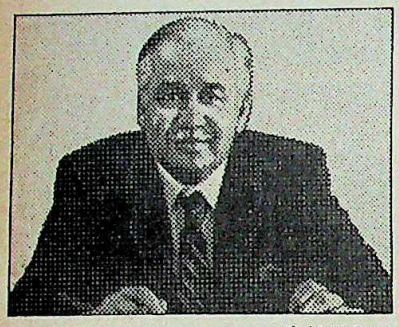
Continuity in Change

Excerpts from the speech of Shri J.N. Sapru, Chairman, I.T.C. Limited, at the 77th Annual General Meeting held on 14.10.1988.



Shri J. N. Sapru

INTRODUCTION

On the economic front, the year 1987/88 has been a difficult one for the country. Inflation, which inevitably rears its head in these adverse circumstances, will need to be closely monitored through carefully designed monetary and fiscal policies, and a severe check on non-plan expenditure exercised to avoid a repetition of the near double digit inflation of last year. The overall favourable monsoon this year has buoyed the economy, and though foodgrains production—estimated at around 170 million tonnes this year—will be an all-time record, we would be well advised to be less euphoric about it as the beneficial impact will take time to permeate. In the interim, the steps taken to accelerate the growth in the service and industrial sectors need to be further augmented through the process of measures now termed as 'liberalisation', and through specific incentives to boost the exports and foreign exchange earnings.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Total income crossed Rs 1200 crores and, after payment of over Rs 819 crores by way of customs and excise duties, net income at Rs 381 crores registered an 18% increase over last year. From the profit after tax of Rs 24.79 crores, your Directors are pleased to recommend a dividend of 35% after retaining Rs 13.18 crores for future growth and expansion.

1. Foreign Exchange

For some years, India's tobacco exports have been declining for several reasons. What has been forgotten is that India is the third largest producer of tobacco in the world, and this important agricultural cash crop could play an important part in the drive for more export earnings, provided it was given the encouragement and incentives to improve its quality and competitiveness in the international market.

Your Company has for some years been taking steps to increase its non-traditional exports and foreign exchange earnings. **Several new areas of foreign exchange earnings are being simultaneously worked upon and I am pleased to highlight that today over two-thirds of your Company's foreign exchange earnings of about Rs 55 crores are from non-traditional items and, further, they represent nearly 15% of your Company's net turnover.**

2. Agri-businesses Division

Last year, I had given you an indication about your Company's proposed entry into edible and non-edible oils. The Agri-businesses Division became a reality from May this year and its objectives are: to assist the country in achieving self-reliance in edible oils and thereby conserving valuable foreign exchange; earning foreign exchange through the export of by-products and other agricultural produce; through research and development, improve farm economics and quality of life in the agrarian sector.

ITC has made arrangements with leading international organisations with proven track records of research in oilseeds for rendering technical assistance and scientific advice for the development of sunflower hybrid seeds. ITC shall spare no efforts to contribute significantly in improving yields and increasing production of oilseeds in the country.

3. Family Planning

We have stepped up our family planning activities in a big way, and are working closely with Government not only for effective distribution of contraceptives, but also through a variety of means to increase awareness among vast sections of the population of this very essential national priority. For the year ended March 1988, your Company achieved a sales turnover of 128 million pieces of condoms, which is the highest ever recorded by any company.

EXCISE

As you are aware the Director, Anti-Evasion, had issued a Show Cause Notice to your Company in March 1987, proposing to levy differential excise duty of Rs 800-odd crores on the allegation that your Company has misdeclared the maximum retail sale price printed on cigarette packets (which formed the basis of payment of excise duty from March 1983 to February 1987) to the extent that the actual prices charged by retailers were higher and that such prices were fixed by the Company for purposes of retail sale in the market. The Show Cause Notice was challenged before the Calcutta High Court but the Trial Court dismissed the Writ Petition on the ground that the allegations could properly be adjudicated upon by an Adjudicating Authority and not by the High Court in its writ jurisdiction.

An appeal was preferred against this judgement and the Appeal Court by its judgement dated 12th October 1988 has now agreed with the trial judge. However, the Appeal Court has clarified that the burden of proving all allegations made in the Show Cause Notice lies with Excise Authorities and your Company would be entitled to submit all evidence in support of its contention as may be considered necessary by your Company. The Adjudicator will decided the matter after considering such evidence.

We have not yet received copies of the Judgement. Further course of action, including appeals to Supreme Court, will be considered and decided after a detailed study of the Appeal Court Judgement is carried out. Meanwhile, your Company will continue to participate in the adjudication proceedings which had commenced in May this year.

I would like to reiterate your Company has not, ever, evaded excise duties nor knowingly trangressed the law.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The trading results of the first quarter indicate a healthy outlook for the year ahead with all Divisions continuing to record satisfactory progress. Your Company will spare no effort to continue to augment foreign exchange earnings.

The next year will see further consolidation of the Agri-businesses Division. This important activity yields gradual results and its growth will be apparent over a period of three to four years. It is your Board's plan to engage in a phased, modular expansion into downstream products in the future.

These results would not have been possible without the dedicated endeavour of all our employees at every level of your Company's operations. Thank you also for your continued and unwavering support.

PREAMBLE: THE REASSESSMENT

I would like to briefly dwell on the expected responsibilities of large houses and reassess and reaffirm your Company's sense of purpose and direction.

Public debate would seem to imply that as a nation we have only weaknesses and no strengths. We seem to be taking delight in publicly berating ourselves and highlighting what is wrong and not what is right. Let us build from our strengths rather than focus always on our weaknessess.

We forget the sheer enormity of our country, and the magnitude of our achievement in increasing the National Income 28 times since the first decade of planning. Of creating an infrastructure which is the envy of even the developed world.

India is not short of resources. Economic surpluses are not God given nor created automatically. They are the result of what the human resource does with the physical or material resources. The solution to our economic advance is very much in our hands and in our ability to mobilise the creative productivity of our vast human resources.

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Your Company as a corporate citizen has also been in the vanguard. **From the mid-'50s to the mid-'80s, your Company's sales turnover increased 31 times, contributions to the exchequer as excise tax 58 times, and the net fixed asset base expanded 21 times. Foreign exchange earnings in recent years crossed the Rs 50 crore mark, and profit before tax has grown more than ten-fold.** What 77 years ago started as a cigarette company, is now a multi-product, multi-market, and multi-technology organisation of businesses, symbolising 'Continuity in Change', and marching ahead in the overall interests of our stakeholders, and the development of our nation.

To establish the rationale of our practice, and obtain our direction, let us assess the market circumstance.

Around 540 million people live above the poverty line in India, and if we take 50% of this, we are already talking about a market-size of around 270 million people, which is growing in numbers and affluence, and which can be compared to any country.

Emanating from the first, the second reality about our market is its vast demand potential. India is a rich country with many poor people. If we can harness and channel our demand potential, with appropriate products and services, we can not only augment commercial surpluses but, in doing so, bring about an unparalleled socio-economic transformation.

THE REAFFIRMATION

To make all this happen, we must reaffirm a sense of direction.

In the past, when ITC was a single-product company, it was possible to get our bearings by answering the question "What business are we in?" Today, with a multiplicity of businesses, we must answer the question "What do we stand for?"

First, ITC is an Indian 'professional' commercial organisation, where control is earned and exercised through performance, and existence is allowed by public sanction.

But though we are professionals, we are not mercenaries. We have our aspirations, our values and a code of conduct that enables a congruence of theory and practice..

ITC is a professional organisation in yet another sense. In ITC there is a continuous revitalising of the human resource to prevent obsolesence, and a continuing focus on accountability and contributions with commensurate rewards.

Perhaps the single most important dimension of professionalism in ITC is the separation of ownership from control. In a large professional concern, where decision-making is decentralised, it is intrinsically required that there be a common understanding of the purpose and mission as the corporation or institution extends beyond and outlives the man or leader.

Secondly, ITC manages commercial enterprise for commercial results.

No society can shed the shackles of poverty until its investments create surpluses. It is the responsibility of business to create surpluses through the effective management of all resources held by it in trust for society for the overall benefit of all stakeholders.

In India we have some soul-searching to do. For reasons rooted in historical experience, the creation of profit has been equated with exploitation. But these attitudes have no relevance to our day and age which will not tolerate profiteering; if we do not impose the most desirable compulsion to make a fair return on investment, we would be falling seriously short of our duties as professional managers of commercial enterprise, and responsible citizens of modern India.

Thirdly, ITC makes sustained contributions to the quality of life.

We realise that the quality of profit, though essential, is not a substitute for the quality of life that our enterprise contributes to for all its stakeholders. Considering our history and commercial profile, our *shareholders* expect security, a growth in the value of their investment, and a meaningful return.

Our *suppliers* and *business associates*, many of them in the small-scale and ancillary sectors, expect organisations like ours to provide them steady long-term markets.

Our *employees* are not only seeking employment but growth opportunities.

Our *customers*, the reason for our business existence, are seeking enduring value; this is reflected in the quality of products and services we provide.

Government expects us to be partners in progress. We must make and take opportunity by providing impetus through research, innovation, investment, and managment to contribute to the uniform development of our nation.

Society expects responsible and responsive behaviour from corporations and not charity. Enlightened self interest demands businesses to make qualitative contributions for the betterment of the environment around us. It requires the enmeshing of business objectives with social needs so that our rich and varied national heritage is encouraged and preserved.

The competing demands on your organisation's varied contributions are harmonised and balanced by an irrevocable commitment to excellence. It is a dynamic concept which makes us reach forever forward. This is a concept which helps direction setting for the professional manager, who is a leader but not a master.

Fourthly ITC values knowledge and derives its strength from the collective knowledge of its people.

When organisations like your Company operate in the Indian market, they do so in a very specific context. In developing countries, alongside the branded differentiated market there is a vast market of unbranded and undifferentiated substitutes. Witness the co-existence of these two types in the product fields of cigarettes and 'bidis', loose and packaged oil, loose and packaged tea, etc. The logics of success in these two markets are different. One has a windfall and speculative short term approach to the market. The other is based on making investments in value addition. Your Corporation belongs to this second type.

To be successful in this context, ITC's strategies must be based on research and superior knowledge of the product and the consumer. Your Company's success depends not on short term expediency, but in creating surpluses by adding value, based on research and superior knowledge of the product, processes and the consumer.

Finally, ITC stands for the ability to harness and allocate resources, both human and financial which are befitting its size and strengths.

One of the main inhibitions to the realisation of the potential of the Indian market is the inability to mobilise adequate resources. In our country there is a belief that big and small are antagonistic to each other. In reality, there should be no competition. Both have their distinctive roles to play and the sooner we realise their complementarity, the sooner will both thrive to mutual benefit and the larger interests of the country. Similarly, there is a belief that wealth creation and distributive justice are mutually exclusive issues. You cannot distribute poverty. Distribution must follow the creation of wealth as night follows day.

The general hypothesis is that to be able to maintain the requisite standards of competitiveness and quality, organisations like your Company have to make substantial investments, which are of a 'sunk' nature. These investments are in areas like R&D, capacities and people. The only way to make these investments economic is to defray them over a large market, which is an intrinsic advantage for enterprise in India.

In this context, ITC as an enterprise must always think big and will adopt strategies that are commensurate to its size and scale. ITC will endeavour to mobilise resources to make investments and absorb gestations which emphasise the strengths of your Company and are in the interests of the country.

In conclusion, let us recapitulate. Your Company is motivated by the five fundamental factors of professionalism, commercial results, quality of life, knowledge and resource ability. The sum of these constitute your Company's reputation and goodwill built over eight decades of consistent dedication to the pursuit of excellence. We value our goodwill and will carry it forward to the future as our most cherished resource.

Integrating these six factors we can state what ITC stands for :

ITC stands for the professional management of commercial enterprise and its planned growth through the effective use of knowledge and resources at its command to create sustained surpluses and contribute to the quality of life as a valued corporate citizen.

This does not purport to be a report of the proceedings of the 77th Annual General Meeting.

Professional Management of Planned Growth

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VYJANTHIMALA

A Test of Wills

Dr Bali's sons stake claim

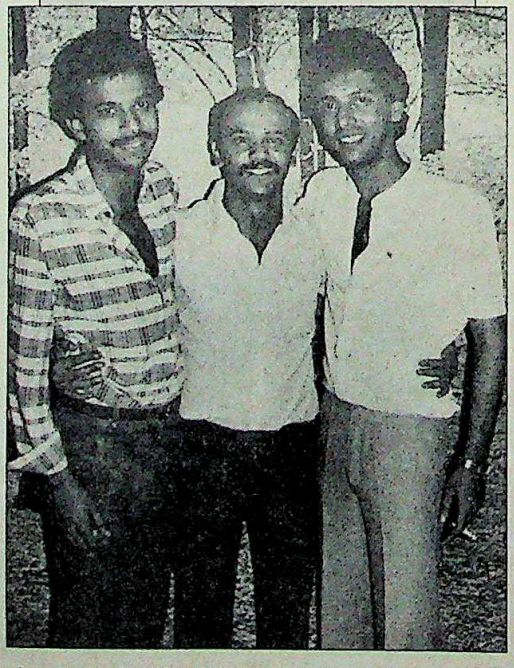
AFTER cavorting across the silver screen, whacking golf balls down long green fairways, and pulling in votes at the hustings, Vyjanthimala Bali, a Congress(I) member of Parliament, finds herself starring in a novel, none-too-palatable show. Last fortnight, in the Madras High Court, she fought for the estate of her late husband, Dr Chaman Bali. Ranged against her in battle were the three sons of the doctor by his first wife, represented by the eldest, Ratan Bali, 32.

The court case threatens to taint the reputation of Vyjanthimala, something she has scrupulously tried to keep above-board in four years of holding public office. Among the serious charges levelled against the glamorous parliamentarian are forgery of the late doctor's will and undervaluation of property with intent to avoid estate tax. Though the proceedings were being conducted in camera, the case highlighted the rift that runs through the Bali family. With general elections around the corner, it also augurs to become a political albatross around the MP's neck.

Even though Dr Bali died more than two years ago, on April 21, 1986, his will became a bone of contention only recently. The issue came out in the open soon after Vyjanthimala filed a civil suit for grant of probate of the will on August 1, 1986.

In her petition, Vyjanthimala has contended that her late husband had bequeathed his entire property solely to her minor son, Suchindra Bali, 14, and had granted her the power to administer the property till such time as the child came of age. While seeking probate, Vyjanthimala undertook to "duly administer the property of the deceased". She also undertook to render an accurate account of the said properties and credits, within one year of the grant of probate. According to the petition submitted by her, the total value of all the movable and immovable properties was approximately Rs 9.64 lakh.

Vyjanthimala's stepsons have charged her with forgery of Dr Bali's will and undervaluation of property with intent to avoid estate tax.



Dr Bali with Vyjanthimala (top); Ratan, Rajan and Raman Bali: family feud

Ratan Bali filed a counter to her civil suit on the grounds that it left out necessary parties—he and his two brothers, Rajan, 30 and Raman, 28. In his petition Ratan contended that Vyjanthimala in her suit had "suppressed material facts and circumstances for the grant of probate" and that therefore the probate ought not to be granted.

In the detailed petition, running into more than 15 pages, Ratan has alleged several other discrepancies. The primary allegation is that the will of Dr Bali, dated July 10, 1985, is "not a legal and valid document and, therefore, the same is not binding" upon the defendant and his brothers. Ratan's petition states that his late father had promised him and his brothers an equal share in his properties (both movable and immovable), along with the other heir, Suchindra, his son by his second wife, Vyjanthimala.

Ratan charges that Vyjanthimala had "induced the said Dr Chaman Bali, during his weaker moments, when he was intoxicated with alcoholic drinks" and "appears to have dictated the contents of the alleged will to her husband, Dr Bali, nearly at midnight on July 10, 1985, at Ashoka apartments, 131, Napean Sea Road, Bombay". Ratan claims in his petition that it is Vyjanthimala who has sought to disinherit him and his brothers, rather than their father, Dr Bali. He alleges that after his second marriage his father had begun to drink heavily, and that at the time the will was written he was "weak, feeble in mind and body and very much under the influence of alcoholic drinks."

Ratan also charges that the signatures of the two witnesses to the will, M. Krishnan and Mahavir Chand Bora, were appended at a much later date, and were obtained by Vyjanthimala with intent to deceive, and on promise of monetary compensation. But perhaps the most serious allegation levelled by Ratan is that Vyjanthimala has grossly undervalued the late doc-

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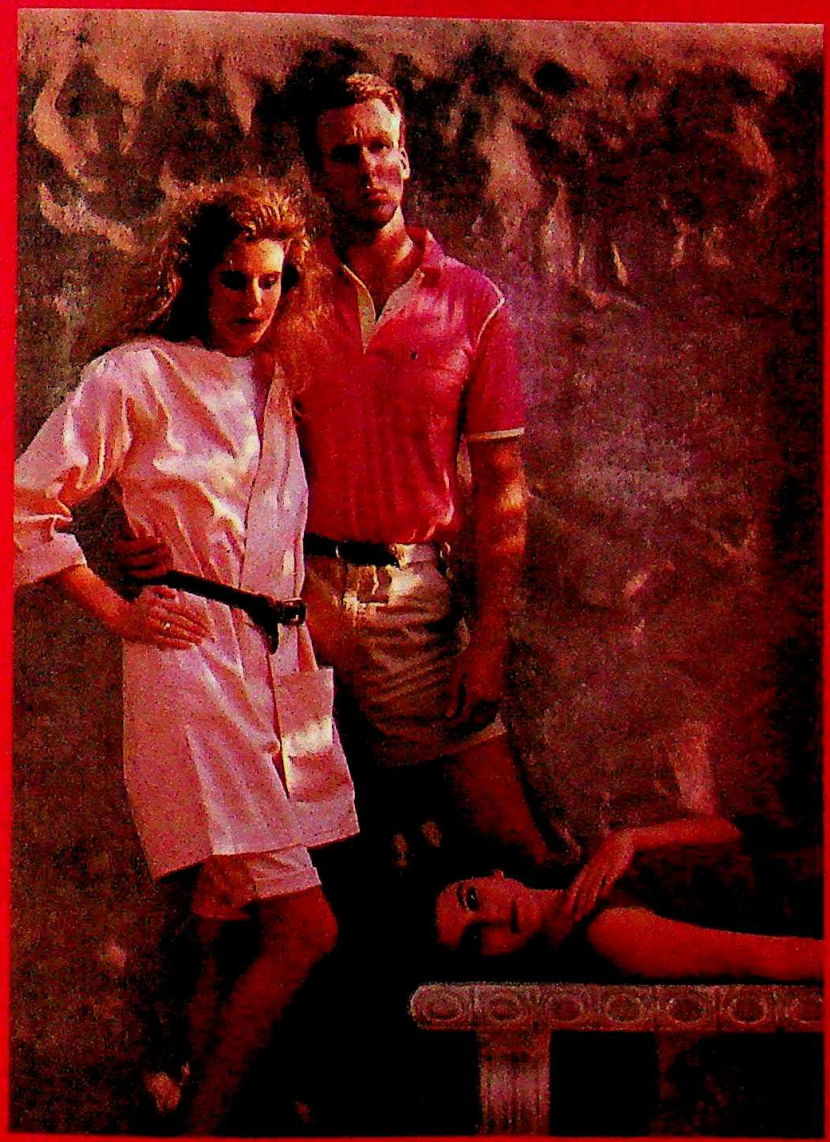

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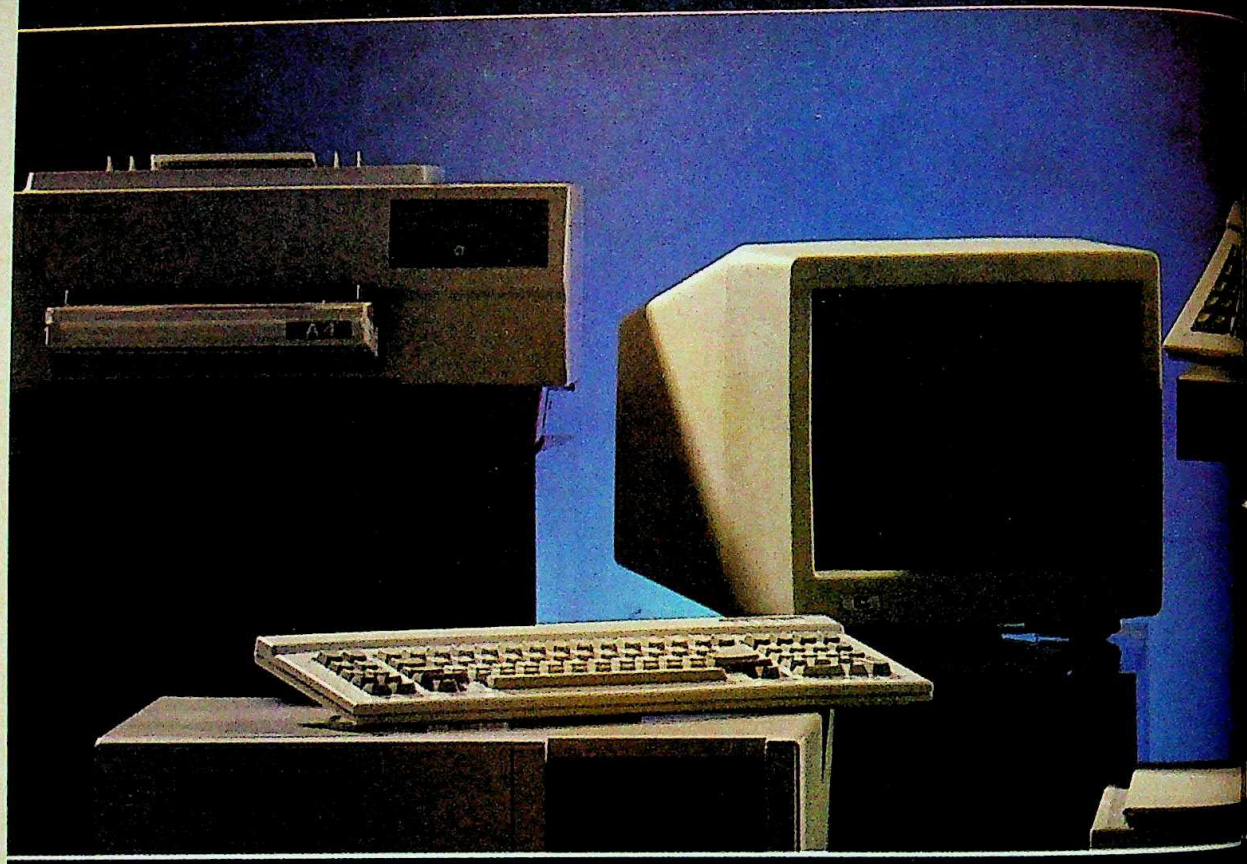

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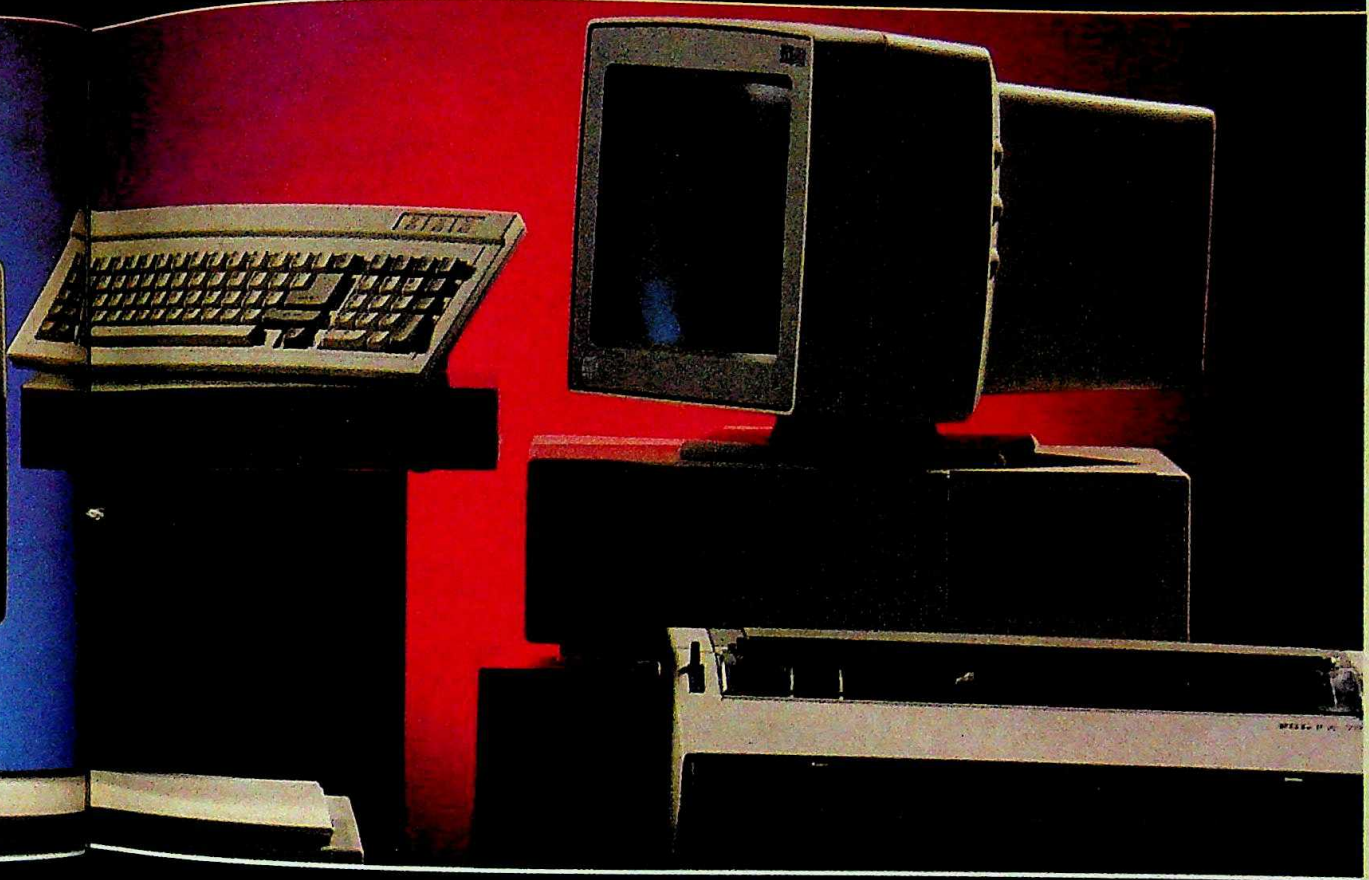

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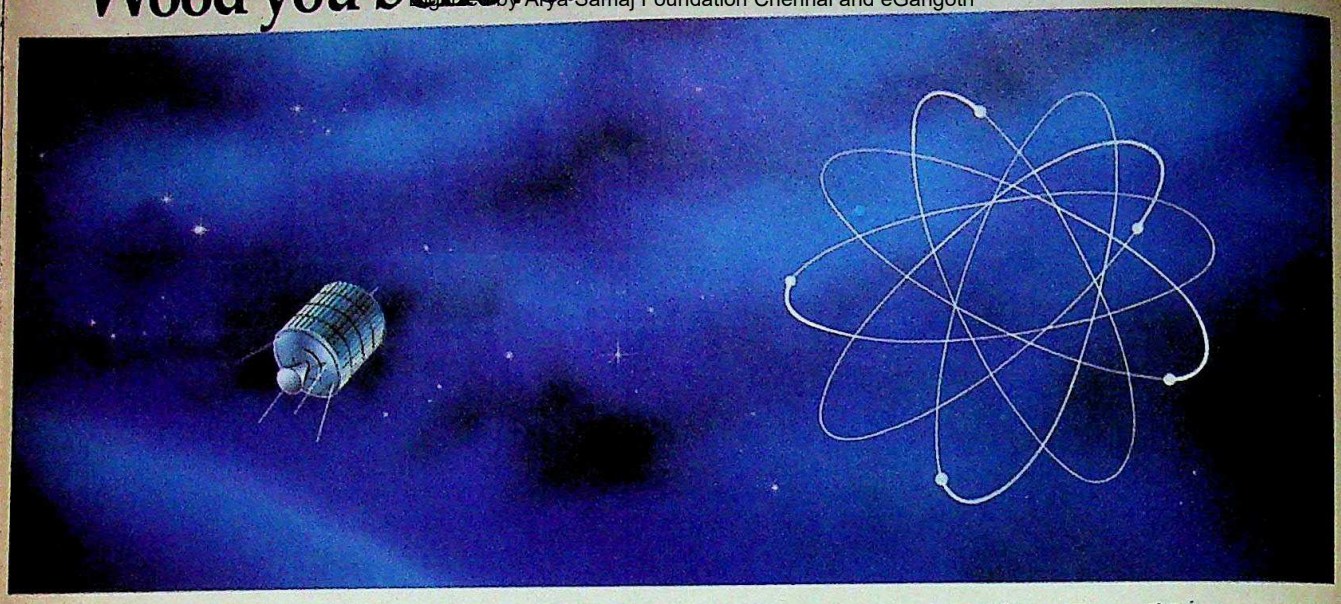

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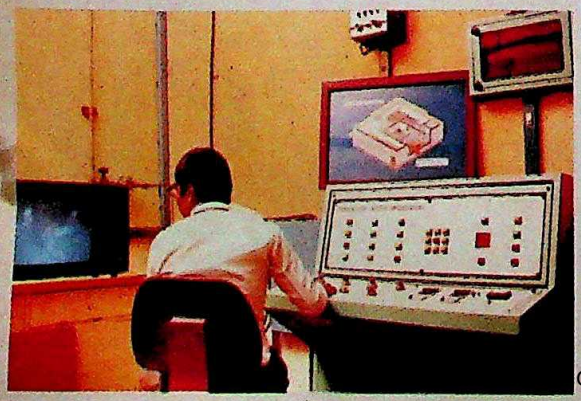

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tor's properties in her civil suit which seeks probate.

Ratan alleges that in addition to the apartment at Napean Sea Road in Bombay and Bali House in Ooty, which are listed in the will, there are several other plots of land in Bangalore and Ooty which have not been mentioned. Ratan states that this has been done in order to "avoid payment of estate duty and/or probate duty". He asserts that the Napean Sea Road apartment, located in a posh Bombay locality, which has been valued at Rs 3.5 lakh by Vyjanthimala is actually worth more than a whopping Rs 75 lakh. The other undeclared properties, he claims, are "worth several lakhs of rupees". Bali House, for instance, he says, has been heavily undervalued, its true worth being about Rs 20 lakh.

Alleging that his stepmother is trying to dispose of all the immovable properties, Ratan has asked the court to appoint a valuer for the assets, so that a "proper and fair" valuation may be made. In conclusion, Ratan has urged that his father be "deemed to have died intestate" and argues that he and his two brothers are "entitled to claim an equal share" in the properties left by the deceased.

In her counter-affidavit, Vyjanthimala asserts that her suit does not "suffer from any infirmity of non addition of parties" and that "the will dated July 10, 1985, executed by Dr Chaman Bali in his own handwriting is true, genuine and same has been duly attested by two responsible persons". She labels as absolutely false Ratan's claim that Dr Bali had promised him and his brothers an equal share of his properties. She contends in her petition that such a claim is "nothing but a figment of his imagination".

Vyjanthimala ridicules the allegation that she "dictated" the will to her husband. On the contrary, she says, "the fact about the execution of this will itself was made known" to her only when the ailing Dr Bali was admitted to hospital. According to her, it was then that her husband expressed the wish that she take custody of the will. As for the contention that she had dictated the will to her husband in a weak moment, she declares she was not even present at the time it was written.

Answering the charges levelled against the two witnesses to the will, Vyjanthimala says that her late husband was a "very aware" person and that it is impossible "that such a person like him would have executed the will without the presence of attesting witnesses". About the claim of Ratan and his brothers to a share in the property, Vyjanthimala asserts that Dr Bali at the time of his divorce from his first wife, Rubi, in 1966, had made a settlement which provided sufficiently for both his former wife and his three sons by her. In the light of this, his will of July 10, 1985, leaving everything to Suchindra is "genuine, legal and perfectly valid".

The famous actress of the '60s also denies having undervalued any piece of property. She claims that to the best of her knowledge they have been correctly evaluated and that therefore Ratan's plea for the appointment of a receiver for the properties of the deceased cannot be allowed.

The suit came up for hearing before Justice A. Abdul Hadi, and Vyjanthimala was cross-examined by Ratan's counsel. Thereafter, the Madras High Court closed for the Dussehra vacation. Even if Vyjanthimala wins the case, it is unlikely that the matter will be settled without going to a higher court. That would be a long-drawn affair. And it promises Vyjanthimala a place in the public eye beside the two other controversial women of Tamil Nadu, Janaki Ramachandran and Jayalalitha. For someone who has been a political nonentity, that wouldn't be such a bad thing. Though Vyjanthimala herself mightn't agree. —LALITA DILEEP

KERALA

Toddy Tussle

A test case for prohibition

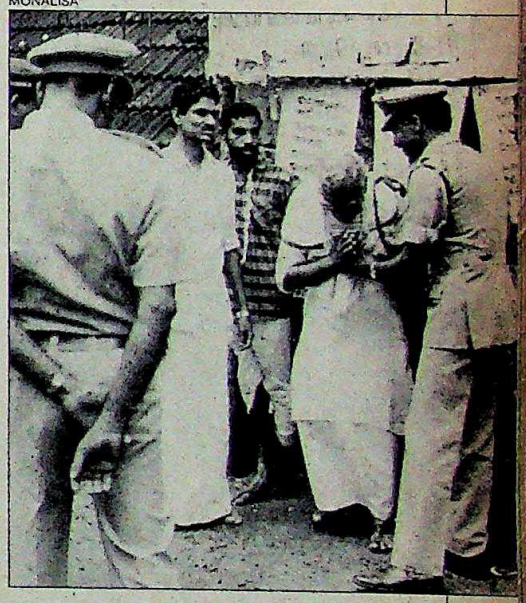
WITH its reduced price of Rs 3 per bottle, the lone toddy shop at Azhimavu village, 27 km from Trichur, should have brought crowds thronging to buy its brew. But only an occasional customer straggles in. Indeed, most of the action takes place opposite the shop under a thatched shed. Here, members of the Kerala Prohibition Council (KPC) have been sitting in a dharna for more than a year demanding closure of the shop.

What began as a quiet protest by five village youths on October 2, 1987 against drunken bouts and unrestrained gambling that the toddy shop engendered has, under the KPC, started to assume the shape of a unique people's movement. The KPC movement has posed a major threat to the powerful liquor lobby—and a state government dependent on excise revenue from liquor—by forcing the closure of 400 toddy and arrack shops in the state. Says Kumara Pillai, vice-president of the council: "Whenever there is a people's movement against a liquor shop we step in. Azhimavu is a unique case in that the entire village is against the shop."

Today, the toddy shop in Azhimavu is festooned with anti-liquor posters and a satyagraha pandal opposite it has become the meeting place for peaceful demonstrators chanting slogans in support of prohibition. The protesters include housewives and students—including schoolchildren—from all over Trichur district who come regularly to express solidarity with the villagers.

But in spite of their agitation being on Gandhian lines, the protesters have met with the occasionally violent response. The liquor barons—fearing pro-

MONALISA



Manmathan being removed from the scene of picketing

hibition and with the tacit support of the police—sent their thugs on the night of the Onam festival to harass the protesters. Earlier, hired goons had smashed the shed and threatened agitators. The CPI(M) and the CPI, with the support of the Congress(I), have been trying desperately to break the agitation.

The villagers then decided to boycott the panchayat election in Azhimavu, a ward in Thanyam panchayat. Said M.P. Manmathan, president of the KPC: "It was at this time that we stepped in and took over the people's struggle against the liquor mafia who had the support of

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the Government and the police."

The prohibitionists even held a referendum in the village on the issue in January. And in spite of the CPI and the CPI(M) asking the people to boycott it, 854 voters from the village of about 1,156 residents took part. While only 98 wanted the shop to remain open and 68 were undecided, as many as 688 voted for its closure.

But the Government showed little sign of respecting majority opinion. K.P. Prabhakaran, a former minister and CPI strongman of Trichur district even organised a labour protection council to counter the agitation. Said he: "Toddy tapping is one of the few surviving traditional industries in the state which employs nearly 60,000 people. If the prohibitionists win here, the anti-liquor trend may spread and it would sound the death-knell of the industry."

Already, the poor sales have become evident in the shop at Azhimavu which used to sell about 160 bottles a day but now sells around 20. Even the reduction in price to Rs 3—the price per bottle is Rs 5 in the rest of the district—failed to do sales much good.

Closure, though, doesn't exactly seem imminent. Said a CPI(M) leader: "A victory for prohibitionists at Azhimavu would have far-reaching implications. The revenue from excise is one of our biggest sources of income for a government starved of money."

For the moment, with the agitation in its second year, it seems certain Azhimavu will be contributing very little in this manner to the exchequer.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Raid the Raj

BIG business and politics are, quite literally, two coins on the same side. Political parties need the funding that big business can provide and big business needs the fudging that politics can provide. The idea being: you back my scratch and I'll back yours. But with big business getting bigger it is also getting more ambitious. And the name of the new game it is playing is take-overs.

Judging by recent trends, the slogan seems to be: a take-over a day keeps the auditor away. But what would happen if today's corporate raiders decided to get together and stage a take-over of political parties, all of which seem to be on shaky ground? Here's how the secret meeting would probably go.

Manu Chhabria: My financial consultant tells me that the Devi Lal group is ripe for picking. I'd like to stake my claim if nobody has any objections.

R.P. Goenka: Solid financial base, but he's all yours. None of us would touch him with a ten-foot turban. Who owns the majority shares?

Kishore Chhabria: His two sons own 49 per cent but they are so intent on doing each other in, and doing him in, that they could be persuaded to sell. The rest of the shares I can get from the financial institutions backing him. They are worried that his ambition to be in the top five might be the group's undoing.

Dhirubhai Ambani: I would have thought Ajit Singh Inc. would be more in your line. After all, with him in the saddle, they must have some foreign equity in America that you can quietly snap up.

Manu Chhabria: Perhaps. But it is a one-man show. Bad management techniques, back-stabbing at the top levels. No second-rung leaders and no organisation. They are only surviving on outside assistance from Chandra Shekhar and Co. Bad risk all round.

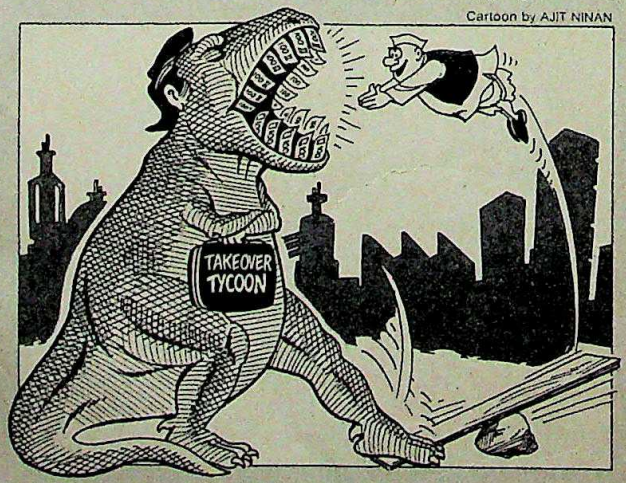
R.P. Goenka: I have one that's as ripe as a plum. The CPI(M) combine in West Bengal. After all, ours is a Calcutta-based group. Chairman Jyoti Basu is too old to carry on any more and he has appointed no heirs to take over. If I go after them hammer and sickle, I should be able to manage. Only problem is they are too deeply in the red and many of the shares are owned by the workers.

Dilip Piramal: I've got my people working on the Bahuguna group. There's a lot of excess baggage there and their shares are really undervalued. His position as president of the company is also shaky right now.

Dhirubhai Ambani: I've set my sights much higher. My target is the Jan Morcha. I think they are an up and coming company with good prospects for the future. They have made some intelligent diversifications and their shares are slightly below par right now, but are expected to shoot up by next year. Also the recent tie-up with Ravi Tikoo should give them an international base. They have problems on the board right now with a lot of members not willing to give up their seats. Company President V.P. Singh is not forceful enough to control them; so it's an ideal situation really.

Sreechand Hinduja: I'm glad to hear that because this leaves the field clear for me to acquire the Congress(I). I know its number one in the rankings and the Gandhi family has owned majority holdings in the company for so long that it will not give up without a fight. But its stock seems to be slipping and Chairman-cum-President Rajiv Gandhi has made some serious errors of judgement lately. He is also in the habit of reshuffling the board members too frequently but without finding any real talent. His branches in the states also seem to be facing problems.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Dhirubhai Ambani: Buying up the shares should be difficult though they are undervalued. Rajiv has majority shareholding. Who owns the rest?

Hinduja: (Pregnant silence).

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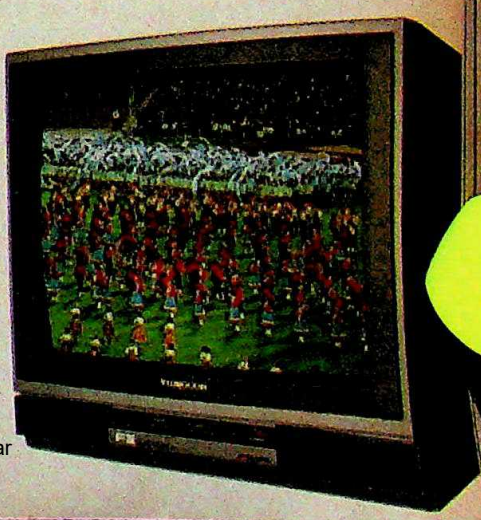

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INDIAN AIRLINES/VAYUDOOT

HOW SAFE?

IT was a disaster waiting to happen. For months Indian Airlines, strapped for aircraft, and Vayudoot, with its over-ambitious expansion, had stretched services to breaking point. The inevitable result: flight schedules had gone haywire and, more serious, air safety norms were flouted. Snags were ignored to keep flights running, aircraft were pushed beyond endurance limits and pilots were under pressure to keep flying. As an aviation expert says: "The airlines were surviving on a wing and a prayer."

Finally on October 19 their luck ran out. In the blackest day in the country's aviation history, first an Indian Airlines Boeing 737 on a routine flight from Bombay to Ahmedabad inexplicably crashed into a *nullah*, 4 km short of the airport. It killed all but five of the 135 on board. An hour later and 3,000 km away, a Vayudoot Fokker slammed into a hill near Guwahati killing all 34 passengers. The combined toll: 164 dead.

"It was just too shocking," says Gerry Pais, the normally affable Indian Airlines managing director. "We were already upset over our crash. When we heard of the Vayudoot one, we were stunned." Aviation circles were not the only ones unnerved by the twin disasters. For the over 11 million passengers, who every year catch over 95,000 flights to 96 destinations in the country, the crashes suddenly raised the foreboding question: how safe are our domestic airlines?

The fear heightened when in the next few days a series of snags occurred on other flights. While most were minor, they resulted in hyper reactions. For instance, the day after the crases, on IC 458, a Boeing 737 flight from Madras to Delhi carrying 121 passengers, the pilots noticed that the light indicating the under-carriage had been lowered wasn't working. Passengers watched with increasing panic as a sweating co-pilot came into the cabin. He checked below seats, where the manual systems were located, to see if the landing gear had in fact been deployed. The tower was asked to flash lights at the underbelly to confirm that the wheels were down. Only then did the aircraft land.

The same day an Indian Airlines Airbus from Madras to Singapore carrying 195 passengers developed a hydraulic leak on take-off. It was a relatively minor snag, since the aircraft has two such standby systems. But when the pilot signalled he was returning, airport officials panicked. An emergency was declared and fire tenders mistaking vapours of the leaking fluid from one of the engines for smoke, rushed to douse it. In the process the engine was unnecessarily damaged.

PRASHANT PANJIAR

A grieving relative of a victim

By the week's end public confidence in air travel had dropped to an all time low. Delhi-based industrialist Atul Punj, an itinerant air traveller, said: "It is high time that Indian Airlines cleaned up its act. It's obvious that there is a total breakdown in the system." Added economist, Professor R.K. Pachauri, also a frequent traveller: "One had always been afraid the way the airlines had been flogging their aircraft and running their services. When the crashes occurred one almost said I knew it would happen."

Two concerned citizens even filed suits in court charging the airlines with

The wreckage of the Indian Airlines

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ANU BHAI SHAH

Boeing 737 at Ahmedabad just after the crash that killed 130 people: black Wednesday

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA

IC 113's FLIGHT TO DISASTER
(OCT 19, '88)

6:47 am
Dalaya radios tower and says "I am outbound" meaning he is commencing the standard P-loop turn to line aircraft with runway.

6:41 am
Control tower gives clearance to IC 113 to descend. 'Fasten seat belts' sign switch on inside the aircraft.

6:35 am
Captain O.M. Dalaya radios Ahmedabad control tower and says: "We are approaching."

5:55 am
IC 113 with 134 people on board departs from Bombay 10 minutes late.

1,700 feet

Normal Flight Path

4 km

7:45 am
Fire brigade reaches spot and begins rescue operations

Ahmedabad Airport

Control Tower

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RAMESH DAVE

Firemen begin salvage operations of the wreckage: a gory scene

callousness. And when members of the consultative committee of Parliament attached to the Civil Aviation Ministry met, they launched a blistering attack against the airlines and the department. A member, P. Kolandaivelu, even demanded that Shivraj Patil, minister of state for civil aviation, resign.

It was apparent that the problems hounding both Indian Airlines and Vayudoot were beginning to come home with ferocious intensity. Aviation officials were finally jolted into reviewing safety measures. Says P.C. Sen, director-general of civil aviation: "We definitely need to take a hard look at the whole system and take all positive corrective measures to see that these tragedies don't occur again."

The causes of the two crashes symbolised in a gory manner the problems plaguing the airlines. Barring a 10-minute delay, there was nothing to indicate to the 129 passengers on board IC 113 from Bombay to Ahmedabad that it was a flight to disaster. Seated at the rear of the Boeing 737, Vinod Tripathi, 52, only wondered why it was so foggy outside. At 6.41 a.m. the airhostess announced they were nearing the airport. The 'fasten seat belt' sign blinked on.

Six minutes later, Captain O.M. Dalaya, the flight commander, radioed the air-traffic controller—"I'm going outbound." What he meant was that he was taking a standard P-shaped turn so that he could bring the plane in line with the runway. He made the turn and then began to descend.

Inside the Boeing, Tripathi got a little worried when he felt the aircraft sink rapidly. Then he heard an explosion and saw fire all around. "The aircraft just broke into pieces," he recalls. He found himself upside down. There was smoke everywhere. He felt something warm near his stomach—his seat belt was burning. He hastily tore it off. "I got up and ran, ran, ran, as fast as I could. My skin was on fire, my heels were burning." And then he blacked out.

The scene of the crash was straight out of a horror film. Bodies charred beyond recognition were strewn all around, some looking like surreal black clay sculptures. The only part of the aircraft left intact was the tail with the 'IA' logo pointing skywards. The shorn-off landing gear column looked like burnt cannons. The debris itself covered over half a kilometre.

Even as fire tenders and police rushed to the spot, the second air tragedy was about to occur. Vayudoot Flight PF 704 had taken off in driving rain from Silchar in Assam and was approaching the state capital, Guwahati. At around 8.48 a.m., the air traffic controller cleared it for landing. And then suddenly, there was an ominous silence from PF 704.

GUWAHATI CRASH

Death in the Mountains

AS PF 704 took off on schedule at 8.08 a.m. from Silchar, the 30 passengers aboard actually heaved a sigh of relief. The flight is notorious for being late. Throughout the flight to Guwahati, the aircraft had to manoeuvre through dense clouds. Air traffic controllers had cleared the aircraft for landing. But after 20 minutes when there was no radio contact from its captain, B.S. Bhogal, officials declared an emergency.

An air force helicopter sent to search for the Fokker Friendship spotted it after three sorties. There is no habitation ar-

BHASKAR BEZBORUAH

The mangled remains of Vayudoot's Fokker: twin disaster

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With increasing concern, the controller kept repeating: "PF 704. If you read me, request position, request position." Twenty minutes later, an air force helicopter was dispatched to search for the aircraft and took three hours to spot the twisted and mangled frame atop a hill.

The two crashes had several striking similarities. Both were coming in to land. Both were doing the standard P-loop manoeuvre, laid down by airport manuals, to line up the aircraft with the runways. There was no 'mayday' signal from either aircraft to indicate something was wrong. Both were lower than the permissible altitude. While IC 113 slammed into the ground, PF 704 veered some 20 km off-course and rammed into a hill.

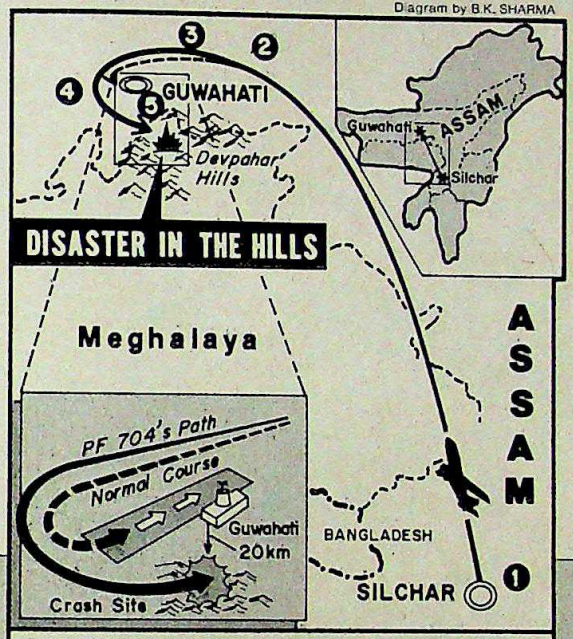
While the probe into the Vayudoot crash was hampered by inaccessible terrain, aviation experts were busy theorising how the Boeing disaster occurred. Shivraj Patil shocked everyone by stating that he did not rule out sabotage. Preliminary investigations at the crash site showed no remains of an explosive material that could have caused a blast.

Fortunately, the flight data and cockpit-voice recorders were recovered. When replayed before the inquiry committee headed by a high court judge, they should provide valuable clues to what exactly caused the crash. Also crucial would be Tripathi's evidence. Tripathi says he heard a blast, saw fire and the plane disintegrating "more or less simultaneously". During descent he says the "aircraft did not wobble". If true, it reduces the possibility of an explosion on board.

Structural or engine problems are being cited as another reason for the crash. Pilots point out that the 737 was the second oldest aircraft in Indian Airline's Boeing fleet of 27 and had already flown for over 42,000 hours. Moreover, documents obtained by INDIA TODAY indicate that the aircraft had several snags four days prior to the crash. The most major fault was a heavy hydraulic leak from the landing gear. All the same, the possibility of engine failure is remote as the pilot would then have had sufficient time to radio a 'mayday'.

But what surprised aviation experts was the readings of one of the pressurised altimeters found lying on the ground. It showed 450 feet when it should have been reading 182 feet (the average elevation of Ahmedabad). That raises the question whether commander Dalaya and his co-pilot Deepak Nagpal were relying on the faulty altimeter and hence had descended too low. Pilots, however, point out that there are

Diagram by B.K. SHARMA



1 8.08 am: Vayudoot flight PF 704 takes off on time from Silchar. The weather is cloudy and rainy.

2 8.48 am: Capt. B.S. Bhogal radios control tower and requests permission to land. Tower says go ahead.

3 8.53 am: Bhogal complains that airport's instrument landing system is faulty. ATC checks it and says that it working.

4 8.55 am: ATC gets worried over silence and radios: "PF 704. If you read me, request position." Emergency declared.

5 12.40 pm: Helicopter pilot spots wreckage atop hill covered by dense forest 20 km away from airport.

ound and the entire area is thick, almost inaccessible, jungle. A helicopter could land only 10 km away. Reaching the site would take seven hours of trekking through treacherous terrain.

A senior police official at the airport picked up two traffic constables and a police driver and packed them into a helicopter. They were dropped 10 km away from the site.

Finally at dawn the next day they reached the wreckage. "It was a sight I would never like to see again," says a shaken A.C. Das, assistant sub-inspector. Bodies, some charred to cinder and others without limbs, were strewn around along with bits of luggage. Some bodies were so badly charred that identification was impossible. It seemed that all 34 people aboard had died instantly.

Even 40 hours after the crash, the bodies were not removed. It was compounded by the ham-handed way in which the state Government conducted rescue operations. It expected constables who had never climbed mountains to trek to the crash site and organise relief. The army with its helicopters, mountaineers and parachuters could have flown the bodies out before they had decomposed to such a state. But strangely, their help was not sought.

Three days later, the bodies were brought to Guwahati where grieving relatives identified them.

It is not just the gruesome tragedy that is causing concern to air travellers in the North-east. When Vayudoot began its services in 1984 to these states, it was expected to dramatically improve communication facilities. The area's road networks are the poorest in the country and states like Mizoram, Arunachal and Meghalaya have no rail network.

Apart from that, it is much cheaper to fly in this area. Taxis charge Rs 1,200 for a six-hour ride from Silchar to Aizawl while Vayudoot takes 20 minutes and costs Rs 160. Yet, one of the worst operational records of the airline is in the North-east. Flights get cancelled practically everyday to the chagrin of passengers who are not compensated with accommodation or assured of a seat the next day.

In the North-east, Vayudoot is run like a private airline with pilots and petty officials calling the shots. Pilots make the most arbitrary decisions, deciding when and where to fly. No explanations are given. If they are, they are ridiculous. A Dornier due to fly to Silchar from Aizawl, was diverted to Calcutta. A Vayudoot official explained that it was because they had no ticket counterfoils at Silchar!

Aviation sources say that all regulations on the maximum number of flying hours for an aircraft are blatantly violated due to the acute shortage of aircraft. Vayudoot operates only two Dorniers and two Fokker Friendship aircraft to 20 stations. In fact, the Fokker which crashed was one of the oldest aircraft in service, having logged 51,000 hours.

—RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

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three other altimeters on board and surely the crew would have cross-checked the readings. Moreover, many pilots believe that the altimeter may not have been defective after all. The approach instructions given to all pilots for landing at Ahmedabad pointedly warns them about the presence of trees and pylons at the height of 380-400 feet at one end of the runway. The altimeter reading of 450 feet could mean that Dalaya flew into the trees and pylons, a possibility corroborated by Tripathi's description of the crash.

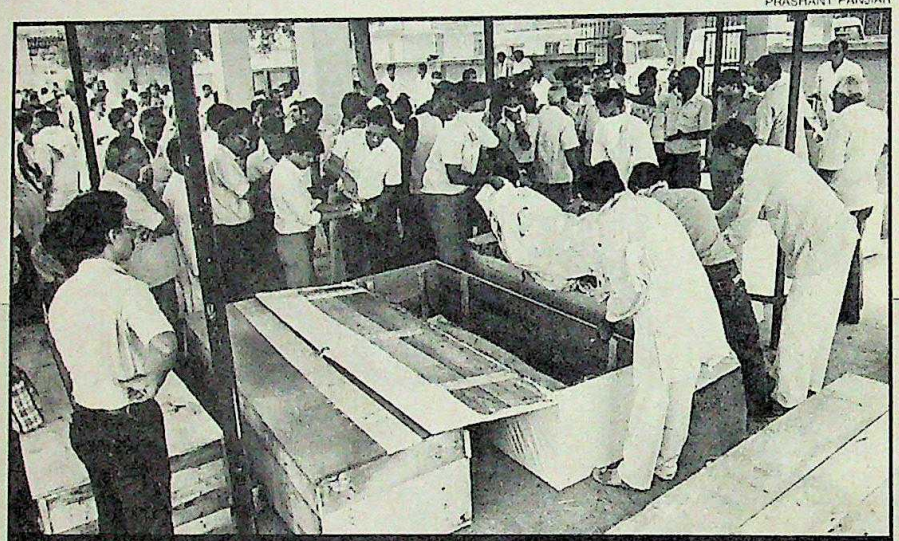
An overwhelming number of aviation experts go for the theory of pilot error—coupled with a defective altimeter. The on-board instrument landing system showed that the aircraft was on line with the runway. All the flaps—which give the wings greater width—were down, indicating that the aircraft had begun descent. Dalaya had even radioed the tower saying: "I'm inbound. Will call when runway in sight." Many believe that the aircraft was descending too rapidly.

Though the visibility at the time of the crash—2 km—was much higher than the minimum required, patches of smog could have clouded the crew's sight. Both pilots may have failed to check their altitude because they were searching for the runway and had descended to the minimum permissible altitude of 500 feet at Ahmedabad. By the time they realised that the ground was not far—or if a defective altimeter was showing 50 feet less than it should, it would have been too late to pull up.

Captain B.S. Bhogal and co-pilot K.R. Reddy of the ill-fated Vayudoot flight seem to have been confronted by a similar problem. Experts say that despite bad weather it was safe enough for Bhogal to land. There was certainly no reason for him to have veered almost 20 degrees off course and crash into a hill. Unless while concentrating on sighting the runway, the two pilots had dangerously dropped their height below the minimum of 2,000 feet, gone off course and crashed into a hill.

As Air Marshal C.K.S. Raje, chairman, National Airports Authority of India

PRASHANT PANJIAR



A victim's remains being lowered into a coffin: shock and disbelief

AHMEDABAD CRASH

'Daughter, Have Courage'

IT was unusually foggy in Ahmedabad on the morning of October 19. As Pratapji Ramsinhji Thakore, 45, a farmer who was out in the fields near Nana Chiloda village, recalls: "I could not see beyond five feet."

Suddenly, directly over him, he saw a huge aircraft, flying unusually low and emitting smoke. "I felt the sky was going to fall," he says, remembering the huge fireball that blossomed ahead of him in the fog. He was close enough to see the aircraft brush the top of trees close to his home, come down in a paddy-field, slide over a ridge, its left wing scything a babul tree, and slam into an electric pylon before bursting into flames.

When he reached the spot, other villagers had converged. They lifted the five survivors (Vinod Tripathi, 52, Jaykrishna Rao, 7, Parag Vasawada, 29, Rajiv Pillai, 32, and Ashok Aggarwal, 28) away from the flames but made no effort to go beyond that. As Otaji Thakore says: "We didn't want to touch them otherwise the police would have involved us in some *lafda* (problem)."

Instead, the villagers called the Narora police station and the fire brigade. But they took over an hour to reach the spot although it is hardly five kilometres from the airport.

The scene of the crash itself was horrific. Charred bodies lay strewn all over and the stench of burnt flesh was overpowering. Among the debris lay syringes, a computer print-out of the sales analysis of May and Baker, posters of the Sumeet mixer, a plastic milk-bottle with the nipple intact, an original copy of an ONGC tender, and, as a poignant reminder of the limits beyond which human endeavour cannot defy gravity, a safety-leaflet issued by Indian Airlines.

By noon, Amarsinh Chaudhary, former PCC(I) chief Ahmed Patel, Union Planning Minister Madhavsinh Solanki, Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Shivraj Patil, and Indian Airlines Managing Director Gerry Pais arrived at the site. Patil promptly announced a judicial inquiry and compensation of Rs 2 lakh to the next of kin of the deceased.

By then the news of the crash had begun to spread like wildfire. Sushant Deshmukh, 32, a Bombay-based interior designer, was expecting his wife and children to join him in Ahmedabad. Hearing about the crash, he frantically called Bombay to inquire if his family had boarded IC-113. He only breathed again when he heard they hadn't.

But everyone wasn't as lucky. Tushar Joshi and his mother Chandrika, were wait-listed numbers 49 and 50. But as they had to attend the last rites of an uncle who died the previous night, the airline accommodated them. Manoj Kothari, 34, a Bombay-based business-

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(NAA), and a veteran aviator, says: "It seems there was some kind of pilot disorientation in both the cases that saw them lose height so rapidly. Only the inquiry report will be able to pinpoint the cause."

WHILE the real cause of both the crashes is still a mystery, it would be too simplistic to presume that there was only one single factor. Says Captain B.K. Bhasin, former deputy managing director of Indian Airlines and a veteran pilot: "Plane disasters are usually a complex interplay of factors and there are three or four causes for a crash."

Bhasin is right. In a way, both the crashes are symptomatic of the basic problems that have made the country's domestic airliners increasingly unsafe. Whether it is pilots ignoring established procedures; maintenance staff hurrying through mandatory checks; instrument landing systems not working; bad management practices and ineffective regulatory authorities—they all indicate a rapidly collapsing system where flight safety is the first casualty. Says a veteran aviator: "The system is rotten to the core. It's just a miracle that we haven't had more crashes."

At the core of the problem is bad management and poor planning. Indian Airlines' passenger traffic has been growing at a brisk 11 per cent annually. It touched 10.44 million last year (1980: 6.2 million). But for the past three years, the airline hasn't augmented its fleet of 11 Airbus, 27 Boeing 737s and eight Avros. And though the airline is purchasing 19 A320s from Airbus Industries which should begin arriving by next May, neither the pilots nor the engineers have been sent for training.

To say that the airline is heavily overloaded would therefore be an understatement—half its flights are delayed everyday, there are no standby aircraft, it is always cutting corners, skipping maintenance schedules and ignoring mechanical snags in order to keep its services moving. Each Boeing 737, the workhorse of the fleet, flew for 3,185 hours last year, a big jump from 2,652 hours in 1984. (The world average for a Boeing 737 is just 2,700 hours). This tendency to over work aircraft has obviously taken its toll on safety. Precautionary landings and abandoned take-offs rose to a dramatic 250 last year from just 130 in 1980. Worse, the airline has had five major accidents, both fatal and non-fatal, since then.

If overloading is the problem at Indian Airlines, at Vayudoot it is unbridled expansion. The airline opens new stations at the drop of a civil aviation minister's hat. While in 1983 it was flying to 18 stations, by last year it was servicing 91. The country's third airline now has a fleet of 18 Dorniers apart from five vintage Avros and three Fokker Friendships. But its maintenance units continue to be poorly run and pilots are greatly overworked. In the past two years alone, it has had five major accidents, with the recent Guwahati crash resulting in passenger deaths.

Fast catching up as a feeder service is Pawan Hans, formerly the Helicopter Corporation of India. It has a fleet of 21

man, who had celebrated the birthday of his first child after nine years of marriage the previous week, decided to fly even though he was wait-listed number 14. He talked his way through, pleading he had an urgent meeting. "It must have been his destiny," says an inconsolable friend, Prashant Chovatia.

The scene at the Ahmedabad civil hospital morgue was ghastly. Blood, intestines, and charred bones lay all around. The bodies were twisted with the limbs, firmed by rigor mortis, jutting out grotesquely. Heads had burst open displaying the inside of the skull, others were headless. "The sight was too much to bear. Couldn't the police authorities have decided not to do post-mortems?" asked Shyam Waghmode, whose friend, Pankaj Bar, died in the crash.

Captain Nagpal's mother, Kailash, couldn't bear to even go into the morgue. She tried five times and weeping copiously, retreated to the comforting arms of a nephew. "I just can't believe it," she said in a voice choked with tears. The next day, she visited the crash site and wailed loudly, as if angrily rebuking the forces that had reduced her son to a mere statistic.

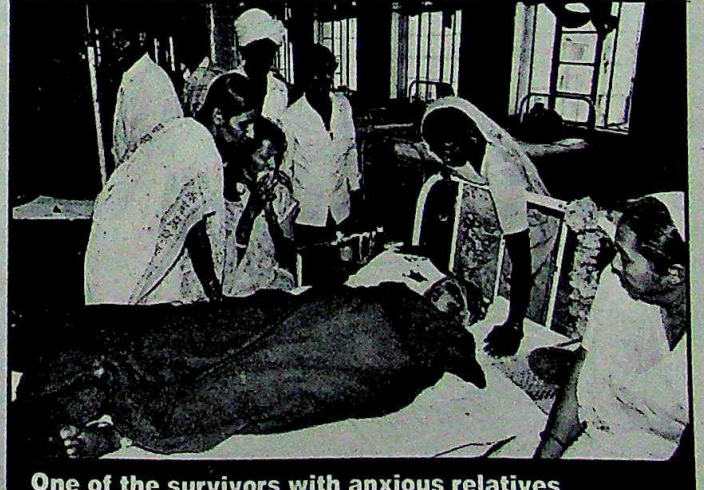
To add to the agony, Ahmedabad lacked adequate coffins. The next day was Dussehra, making it even more difficult to locate a carpenter. A church sent some, and a local voluntary, organisation provided the bulk.

In such confusion, there was a problem which defied solution: six bodies were claimed by two families each. While five disputes were settled amicably, one wasn't. Waghmode insisted that the charred remains of a man were that of Pankaj Bar. He pointed out that Bar had pierced his ears, since he belonged to the Rabari tribe and the belt he wore was given to him at the check-in counter by another relative.

But the family members of Jaykrishna Rao, 7, who survived the crash and was fighting for his life, said the body belonged to his father, Bhagwat Rao, a geologist working in Zambia. Rao, along with his wife Usha and younger son Jeet, had died. Rao's grandmother pleaded with Bar's relatives: why not have a joint cremation? But Bar's relatives, being tribals, wanted to bury the body, while the Raos, being Hindus, wanted to cremate it. Finally, authorities intervened and gave the body to the Bar family, based on the evidence of the belt and the hole in the ear-lobe.

But nothing symbolised the tragedy and grief as much as a young widow, sobbing uncontrollably in her mother's arms at the Ahmedabad airport lounge. Her father, in a gesture of futility, kept patting her and repeating: *"Beti, himmat rakh"* (daughter, have courage).

—SALIL TRIPATHI
in Ahmedabad



One of the survivors with anxious relatives

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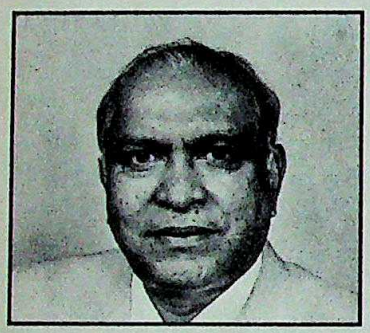
GERRY PAIS

"Our record is not bad"

IN between the flurry of meetings in the Civil Aviation Ministry after the Ahmedabad air crash, Indian Airlines Managing Director Gerry Pais, 59, met Special Correspondent RAJ CHENGAPPA *for an interview. Excerpts:*

Q. Are you planning to review your air safety measures?

A. We have been operating for many years and this crash has been most unfortunate. Our last fatal accident was in 1979. You can see that the record is not all that bad as is being made out. After all, handling 270 flights a day is a lot for any airline. But I think we will now have to do a review of all our systems and see where we can improve. I can't give you specifics because it is a total range of things. I have told my guys to start looking at things and come up with suggestions. The crux of the whole thing is what comes out of the inquiry into the crash.



"I think we will now have to do a review of all our systems and see where we can improve."

Q. One of the major problems seems to be that your services are stretched to breaking point.

A. While we have been utilising the aircraft, I would like to affirm that these are not being overutilised as is being made out. But immaterial of the number of hours we fly, our maintenance checks are rigidly followed. As such the question of safety is predominant in our airline.

Q. You think everything is hunky-dory with maintenance?

A. There is always room for improvement. When we are operating 270 landings there are bound to be problems. What I would like to stress is that when there is a problem where safety is involved, the aircraft is grounded. I don't think aircraft are just pushed through. Why should anybody stick his neck out? After all, in an aircraft anybody could be flying. My family could be there or my relatives. So why should anybody do it?

Q. Then what are your major problems?

A. As an airline, today there has been a lot of growth, more passengers are travelling, so naturally we have a capacity constraint. And with the resources available we have to cope up with this. But once again I would repeat that this has in no way reduced our safety and maintenance standards.

Q. There are charges that there has been no forward planning to augment your fleet.

A. The problem is well known. We have placed orders for 19 Airbus A-320s. Delivery will start by the end of next May. And in the meantime all that was required was lease capacity. We have leased four Boeing aircraft which will join the fleet by the middle of next month. With the induction of these, we would increase our capacity by 40 per cent. Which I think is more than adequate.

Q. One of the problems is that a certain amount of indiscipline has crept into the cockpit in terms of pilots not observing laid down procedures while landing.

A. You are making a very drastic statement. There may have been an accident that has to be gone into. But let us be fair. I think our pilots are among the finest, they are well trained and they are disciplined. And I'm very proud of them.

Dauphines and 19 of the controversial Westland helicopters—which have had rotor problems—and runs shuttle services in several states apart from servicing its main customer, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC).

Already, Pawan Hans' track record is badly flawed. Two months ago it had two major crashes, killing 17 people. Its problems are familiar: poor maintenance and a tendency to push people and machines to the limit. For instance, under pressure to land in bad weather on an ONGC platform off the Pondicherry coast, a pilot tipped the helicopter into the sea, killing all 10 people on board.

With the airlines displaying an utter disregard for safety norms, it was just a matter of time before a major air disaster jolted the country. Says an aviation expert: "It's incredible how these airlines run on such bush operations and roadside mechanic type of maintenance. What they don't seem to realise is that while you can stop and check your car if it malfunctions, planes just drop from the sky." Certainly, the country's airlines stand guilty of an unprofessional attitude in several key areas:

Cockpit management: The world over, increasing emphasis is being placed on discipline and teamwork in the cockpit. But not so in India. Though the NAA has worked out a standard landing procedure for most Indian airports, a senior Indian Airlines pilot admits: "Hardly a quarter of us go by the manual. And the standard call-outs to check various instruments are rarely done."

Experts also complain of pilots "hot rodding on runways, taking steep and unsafe turns and cutting corners due to overconfidence." On August 9 last year, instead of proceeding to the apron, a Vayudoot pilot at Calcutta airport took the Dornier aircraft towards the hangar without permission. He foolishly shut his engines. The plane, VTEIP, was on a gradient and it began to roll. Since the engines were off, the hydraulic brakes did not work and the aircraft crashed into a van. It was completely damaged but fortunately the passengers on-board escaped unhurt.

Indian Airlines pilots too are accused of a casual approach. On June 18 this year, a Boeing bellylanded at Delhi airport because the two pilots wanted to practise a 'Leh landing'. This involves deploying wing flaps to a lesser degree and landing at a high speed on a shorter runway. The pilots shut the aircraft's alarm systems which go off if the flaps are not fully down while landing. But while descending they

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forgot to lower their undercarriage. The alarm would automatically have given a call—"whoop, whoop, pull up,"—if the plane came too low without its wheels down. But since the alarm was switched off, there was no warning and the plane made a belly-landing. Miraculously, there were no casualties.

THE relative inexperience of the new breed of co-pilots and their questionable ability to help out pilots in case of an emergency is another problem. Pilots no longer need experience on turbo-props before graduating as co-pilots in jets. Thus the captain of a Boeing with around 4,000 hours of flying is usually far senior to the co-pilot, who may have just 500 flying hours. And the younger man is often too scared to warn the commander of a mistake.

For instance, the doomed Boeing which crashed at Ahmedabad was being co-piloted by 26-year-old Nagpal, a direct recruit into jets. He joined the airlines on April 6, 1987 and was cleared as co-pilot only on May 27 this year. His total flying time was around 500 hours, of which 300 hours were on Boeings. On the other hand, Captain Dalaya, 37, joined the airline on April 24, 1979 and flew as a co-pilot on Fokker Friendships till he was given command on March 19, 1983. He was endorsed as a Boeing co-pilot on April 1, 1986 and was given command on August 19 last year. He had 5,985 hours of flying, with a total of 2,963 hours as flight commander. The relative inexperience of Nagpal could have hampered reactions in a crisis.

The Ahmedabad tragedy has galvanised Indian Airlines into taking some corrective measures. Says Captain N.S. Ramachandran, deputy managing director: "We plan to do random checks of cockpit voice recorders to see if pilots are doing standard call-outs and observing mandatory procedures." But unless cockpit discipline is strictly enforced, these steps will remain woefully inadequate.

Aircraft maintenance: If there are problems in the cockpit, the stories from the hangar are no less hair-raising. On September 25, after an Airbus flight took off from Hyderabad, the pilot found that the engines were not developing full power. He immediately brought it down and had the aircraft grounded. The maintenance department claimed that it had rectified the snag and the Airbus flew to Madras. On the very next flight, the pilot again found loss of power and again had it grounded. After the snag was supposedly rectified, the aircraft was sent to Bombay where other pilots observed the same problem.

There are bitter complaints from pilots about mechanical snags not being properly rectified and aircraft being cleared indiscriminately. Apart from major checks after 500 to 600 hours of flying, every transit flight has a kick around check, a night halt and flashlight check, aimed at spotting any leaking parts or visual damage to the engine or landing gear. But as one pilot says: "What happens is pencil whipping over the various mandatory checks."

Most maintenance is skipped using the minimum equipment list or MEL prescribed by manufacturers as an excuse. Under this manual, an aircraft can be allowed to fly even with certain snags that do not directly affect flight safety. Pilots have now become familiar with the terms engineers use to overlook snags—carry forward under MEL. To be rectified during night halt to avoid delays. Rechecked and found okay. Cleaned and found okay. Last week, the *Indian Express* published a blank maintenance form that had the signature of the engineer authorised to clear aircraft.

Several engineers admit that they are under pressure from their supervisors to release aircraft with snags. The problem is compounded because the main Boeing workshop is in Delhi while the Airbus is repaired in Bombay. If a Boeing develops problems at other airports, another aircraft carrying engineers and components has to fly to the spot. P.N. Kumar, Indian Airline's deputy managing director in charge of engineering, admits: "There are no standby aircraft and this puts pressure on maintenance."

The stories from Vayudoot are even more shocking. The fuel injection nozzles in the Dornier aircraft are supposed to be cleaned every 200 hours or else carbon builds up, resulting in inefficient fuel burning and torching of the engine. But it was found that although many aircraft had completed over 2,000 hours of flying, the fuel nozzles had never been cleaned. Vayudoot's problems are compounded by the fact that most of the senior engineers are retired Indian Airlines employees who have no long-

DOMESTIC AIR CRASHES (FATAL)

- ● 3.6.63: A Dakota crashed at Pathankot. Structural failure suspected. Killed: 29.
- ● 11.9.63: A Viscount crashed near Agra after descending suddenly. Killed: 18.
- ● 7.2.66 : A Fokker rammed into a hill at Banihal Pass. Killed: 37.
- ● 15.2.66: A Caravelle undershot the runway in Delhi. Killed: 2.
- ● 21.4.69: A Fokker crashed near Kulna, Bangladesh. Killed: 44.
- ● 29.8.70: A Fokker hit a mountain after take-off at Silchar. Killed: 39.
- ● 9.12.71: An Avro crashed en route to Madurai. Killed: 20.
- ● 11.8.72: A Fokker undershot the runway at Delhi. Killed: 18.
- ● 15.3.73: An Avro crashed on a training flight at Secunderabad. Killed: 4.
- ● 31.5.73: A Boeing 737 crashed at Delhi while landing. Killed: 49.
- ● 12.10.76: A Caravelle crashed at Bombay after engine failure. Killed: 95.
- ● 17.12.78: A Boeing 737 crashed near Hyderabad airport. Killed: 3.
- ● 26.4.79: A Boeing crashlanded at Madras following a suspected explosion. Killed: 40.
- ● 4.8.79 : An Avro hit a hill at Pune. Killed: 45.
- ◆ 14.7.88: A helicopter crashed at Vaishno devi. Killed: 7.
- ◆ 12.8.88: A helicopter crashed into the sea 10 miles off Pondicherry coast. Killed: 10.
- ● 19.10.88: A Boeing 737 crashed at Ahmedabad. Killed: 134.
- ■ 19.10.88: A Fokker rammed into a hill near Guwahati. Killed: 34.

● Indian Airlines
■ Vayudoot
◆ Pawan Hans

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term stake in the organisation.

Harsh Vardhan, the young managing-director, dismisses all charges against the company and says that special efforts have been made to improve maintenance. Says he: "Much of the complaints are motivated by manufacturers because we have pointed defects in the aircraft."

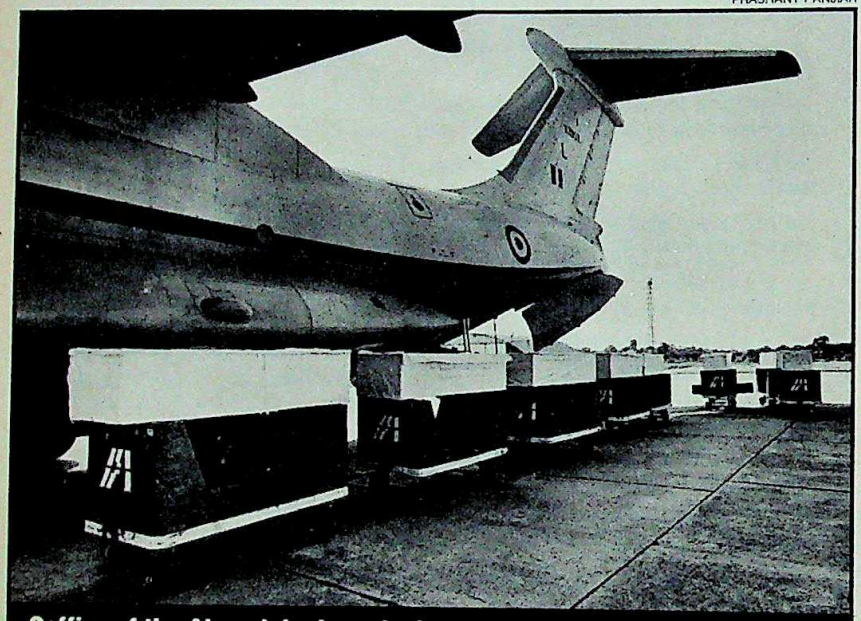
Airport landing systems: Just before Vayudoot's PF 704 rammed into a hill last fortnight, the pilot called the control tower and complained that the instrument landing systems (ILS) to guide his descent were faulty. The air traffic controller is reported to have checked and said it was working. Likewise, in Ahmedabad, the distance measuring equipment was said to be out of order, though NAA officials deny it.

Pilots frequently complain of inadequate and faulty navigation aids at several airports. Out of 90 airports in India, just 26 have some sort of ILS aids and only the international airports are fully equipped; only now are radars being installed to cover Indian air space; weather reports are still far from accurate. Says Air Marshal Raje: "Ideally every airport should have an ILS and radar coverage. But it costs money and we just don't have it." A phenomenal 36 per cent of the air accidents in the world happen during landing and wherever accurate landing systems have been installed, safety has improved dramatically.

Communication facilities continue to be poor, especially in the smaller airports. It was due to this very reason that a Vayudoot aircraft crashed in Aurangabad this August. Though the plane was destroyed, luckily there were no casualties. Just before the aircraft was landing, a meteorologist recorded stiff gusts of winds capable of blowing it off-course. Since the control tower telephones weren't working, he ran up the five flights of stairs to convey the message. But by the time he reached there, the plane had crashed.

True, facilities in Indian airports are dismal. But airlines exacerbate the problem by being careless about their operations. For instance, Pawan Hans was running shuttle services to Vaishnodevi, where there were no landing aids or radio communication. Result: in August a helicopter crashed when it ran into clouds while trying to land. All the 12 people on board perished.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Coffins of the Ahmedabad crash victims being loaded for Bombay

Regulatory bodies: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is the country's watchdog for air safety. But it hardly bites and rarely barks.

Airline engineers constantly pull the wool over the DGCA's eyes. On September 29, Vayudoot engineers commissioned an aircraft that had been grounded for a month due to engine trouble, claiming it had been repaired. The DGCA promptly gave it a certificate. But when the pilot took off he found that he was not getting half the power in the engines and came back cursing. The DGCA did not take any action against the erring mechanics. Not surprisingly, DGCA visits to the hangar are called "tea and samosa time"—where air worthiness certificates are issued without much fuss.

Worse, its staff strength has not kept pace with airlines' fleet expansion. In fact, it was reduced to a third of its original size after the NAA was formed, divesting it of air traffic control and airport maintenance. Indicative of the importance the Civil Aviation Ministry gives DGCA is the fact that for over two years a technically qualified director-general has not been appointed. Sen is an IAS officer who is also a joint secretary in the ministry.

Till now these factors had not really damaged the airlines' track record. The last major Indian Airlines crash took place in August 1979, when an Avro HS 748 rammed into a hill, killing 45. But since 1984, the airline has had four major non-fatal accidents—where the aircraft was either totally wrecked or extensively damaged. The Indian average 'hull' (aircraft) loss rate of one for every 2.15 lakh hours is twice the world average of one for every 4.65 lakh hours, and is comparable to Asia's average of 2.35 lakh hours.

All the same, statistics show that all over the world air travel is still the safest means of transport. In India, unfortunately, the dividing line has been allowed to shrink to dangerous levels. In that sense, the two air crashes may have come as a timely warning. They have certainly brought to the forefront the problems dogging the country's airlines and introduced a sense of urgency in implementing reform.

But as Bhasin points out: "Improving air safety is not a baby show. It's a Herculean task. There is no easy solution to these things." That is compounded by the fact that Indian Airlines and Vayudoot are run like stodgy bureaucracies, have powerful unions and weak managements, are riddled with political interference, and get away with glaring flaws because they are monopolistic corporations. But the need for quick reform is imperative. Otherwise, black Wednesday may easily be repeated.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA with SALIL TRIPATHI in Ahmedabad and RAMESH MENON in Guwahati

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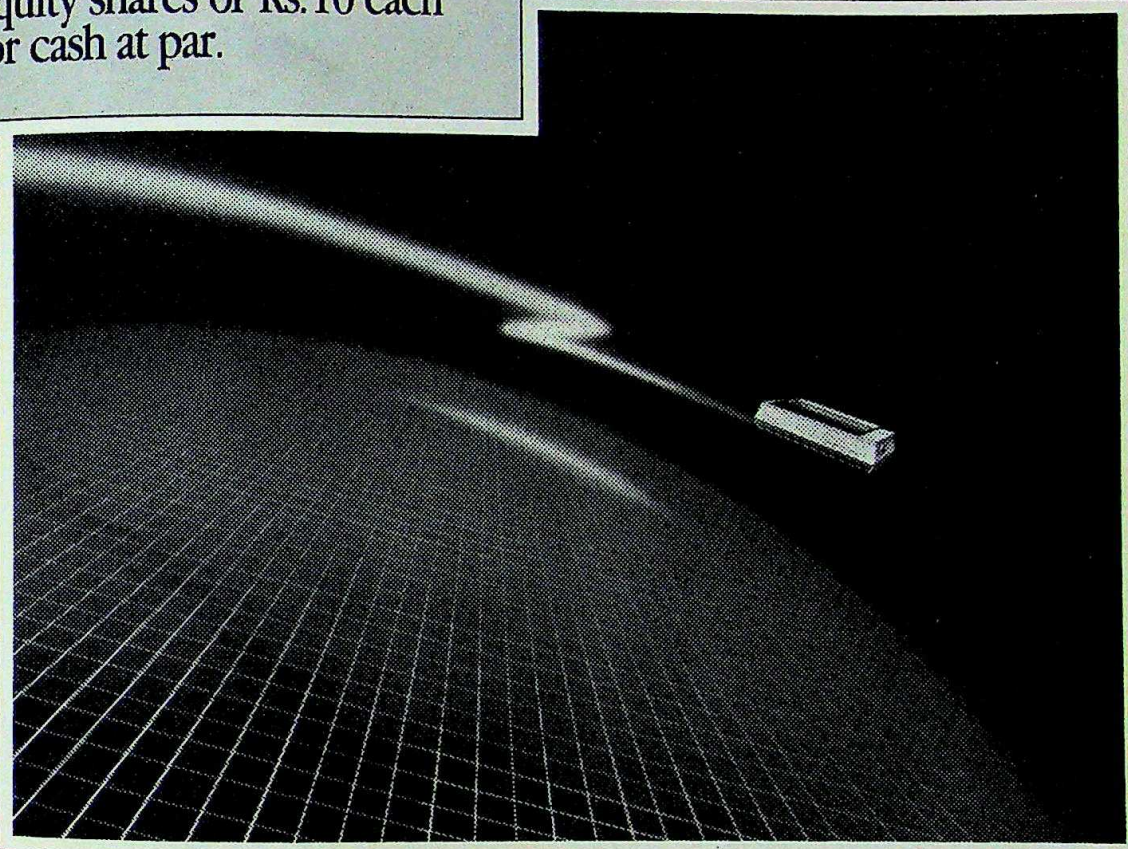

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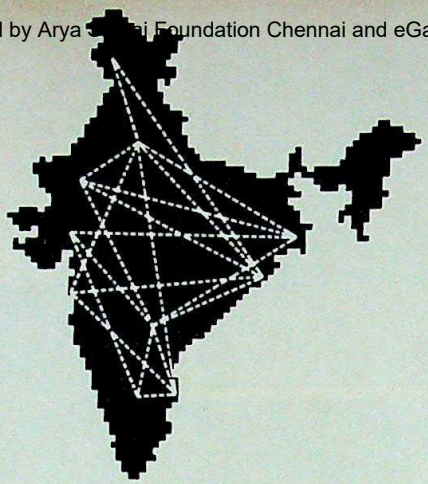

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Indulging in Theatrics

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu has to frequently rein in his over-enthusiastic colleagues. However, late last month he engaged in some theatrics himself. Frustrated by the Central Government's delay in clearing foreign credit for the Rs 1,000-crore Bakreshwar super thermal power plant, he decided to lay the foundation-

ASHOKE BOSE

Jyoti Basu inaugurating Bakreshwar thermal plant

stone of the 840 MW project himself. "We can no more go about with a begging bowl entreating the Centre for the project's clearance in the state sector," said the enraged Basu. "The Centre has badly hurt the self-respect of the people of Bengal."

Describing the thermal plant as a "people's project", the chief minister called for liberal donations from the public. The youth and student wings of the CPI(M) even began organising blood donation camps for the successful implementation of the project. A Calcutta newspaper wondered whether "power plants were run on blood". The state Government was, however, in no mood to bother about bourgeois sarcasm. Power Minister Prabir Sen Gupta declared that the project would be completed by 1995.

The Centre struck back. Union Energy Minister Vasant Sathe called the decision of the state Government a bluff. So did the state opposition leaders. That the West Bengal Government got somewhat nervous after all the criticism, was not entirely without reason.

The Left Front Government has a poor track record in implementing projects. For instance, the Teesta Barrage, the second Hooghly bridge and, more relevantly, the Kolaghat super thermal power station, are yet to be completed long after their completion dates expired. The state's record in running existing power plants is equally dismal. Capacity utilisation has been an abysmal 43 per cent compared with the national average of 56 per cent.

Spreading the Word

WHEN it comes to raising funds, Kerala's comrades are up ahead. Plastic buckets in hand, members of the CPI(M) took to the streets and collected Rs 35 lakh in a single day—at least, that is what the party claims. The money will finance a new edition of the party's organ, *Desabhimani*, to be published from Trivandrum.

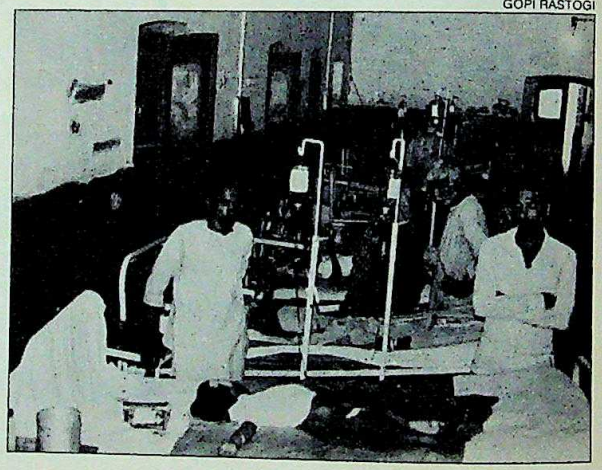
Published from Cochin and Calicut, *Desabhimani* with 1.10 lakh copies has the fourth largest circulation in the state. Both *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi* are pro-Congress(I), the former more so. The new edition of *Desabhimani*, which will have modern offset printing facilities, is intended to help the CPI(M) combat these and to disseminate its point of view to its supporters in the southern districts of Trivandrum and Quilon. The editors expect to sell 60,000 copies in the region. Meanwhile, the capitalist bug has bitten the CPI too. It too has started collecting funds for its own organ, *Janayugam*. Surprises in Kerala never cease and no one would be shocked if before long, one of the two communist parties declares a public issue.

Raging Epidemic

CHILDREN, mainly between five and 13 years old, have been dying of a deadly brain fever in seven districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The viral fever, medically termed Japanese encephalitis, has claimed 1,500 lives since September this year. Once the infection sets in, the chances of survival are 50 per cent, the patient succumbing to death within three days to a week.

The first case was reported in Gorakhpur on September 3, and by October 20 more than 3,500 patients from 1800 villages had been treated in different hospitals in Gorakhpur

GOPI RASTOGI



Encephalitis patients in Gorakhpur hospital: deadly viral

and six other adjoining districts. Medical experts believe the pig population in these districts is the host for the virus, whereas mosquitoes are its carriers.

The symptoms of the disease are innocuous. It starts with a headache, followed by a fever. If the patient is not taken for a proper diagnosis and treatment within the first 24 hours, there is little medical science can do to save him. Said a Health Department doctor: "Once the virus establishes itself in the human body, the only treatment is to strengthen the immune system so that it can battle the disease as far as it can." Health Department sources say though the disease is on the wane, an average of 30 victims are dying daily due to the killer fever.

The situation may have been different had the Government reacted in time. Medical experts believe the disease has been transferred to Uttar Pradesh from Nepal. Since 1978 when 1,072 persons died from encephalitis, the disease has been recurring, but the Government has taken no preventive measures. This year too the required vaccine is in short supply, and the state Health Department has been unable to organise sufficient anti-mosquito spraying and fogging equipment.

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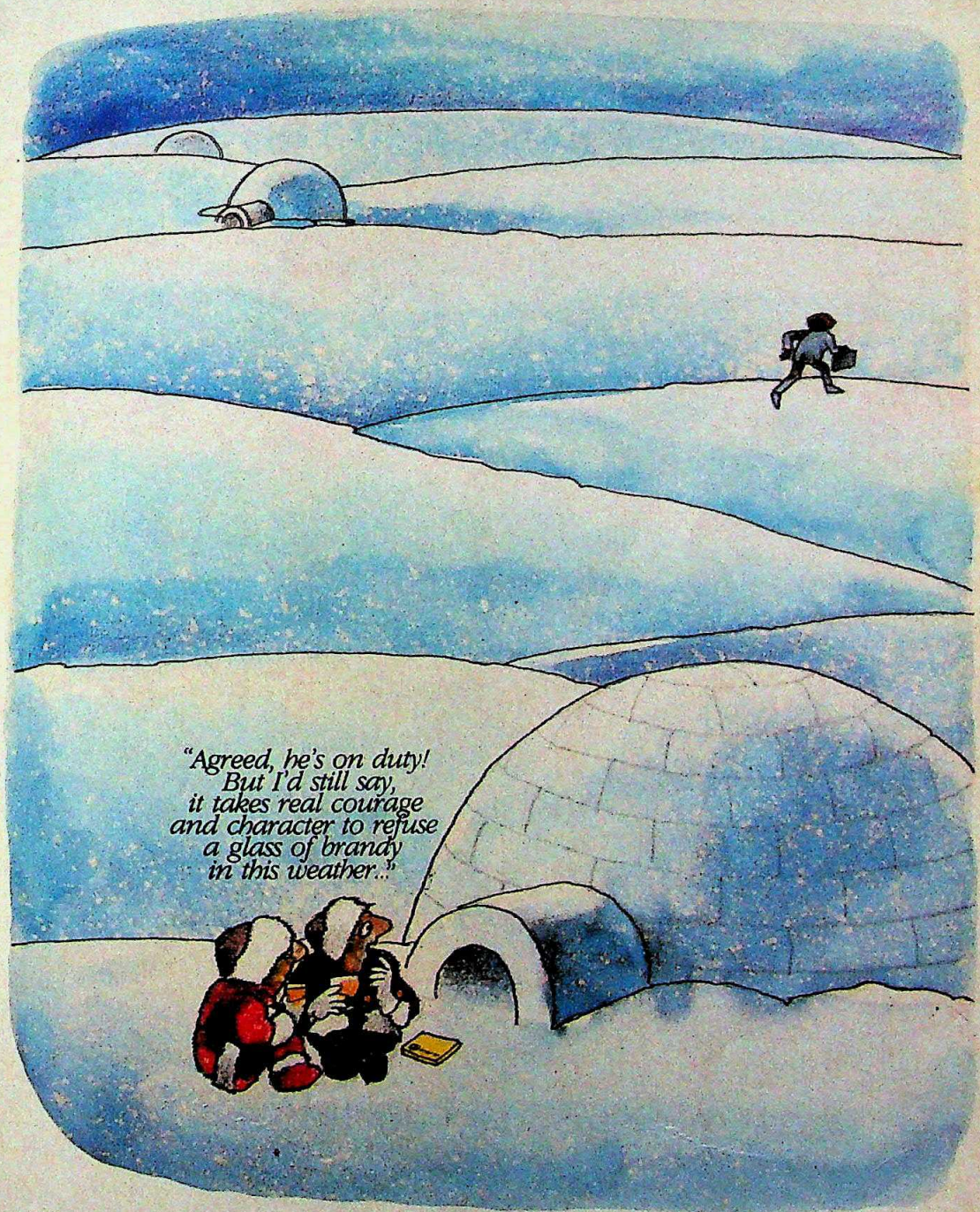

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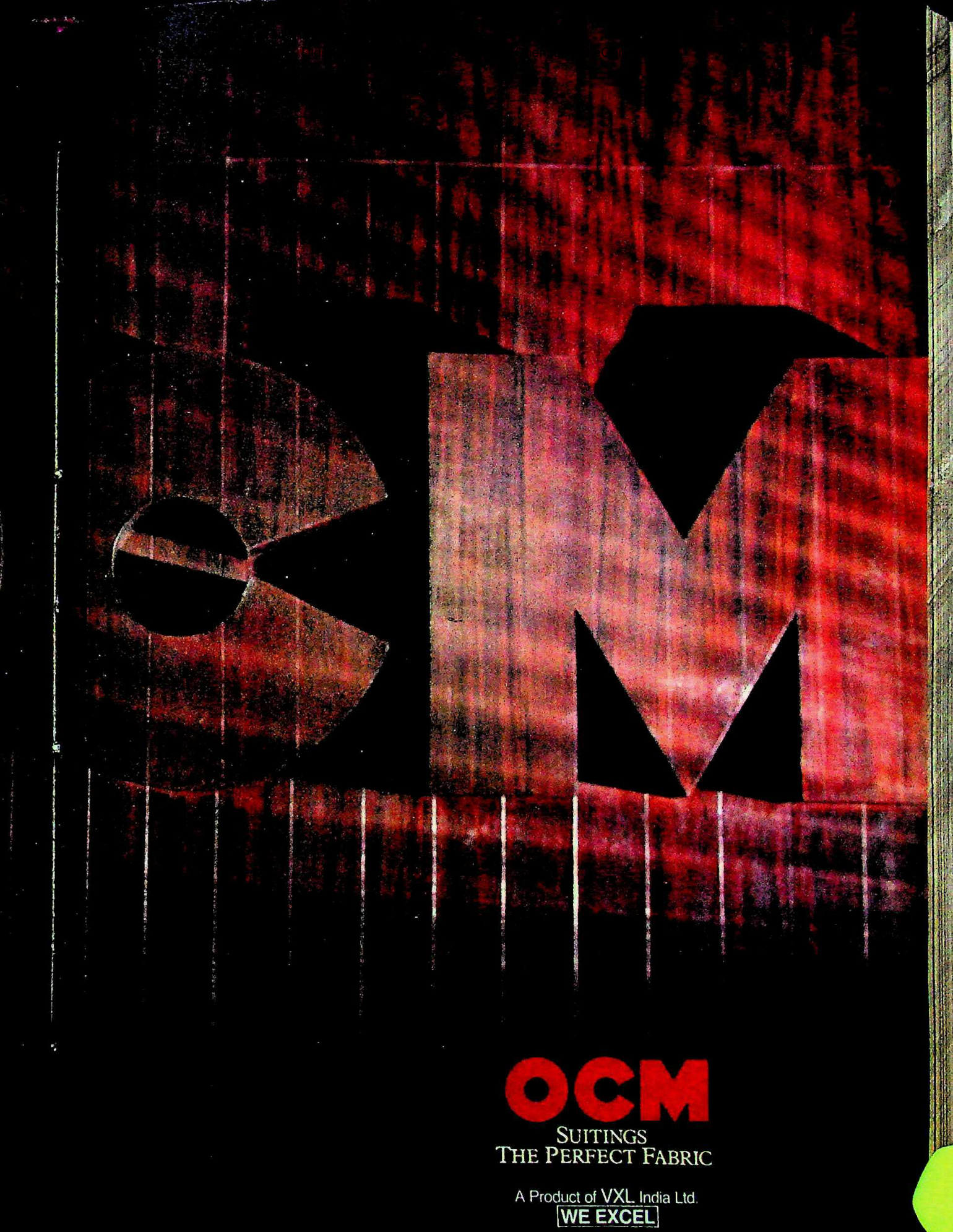

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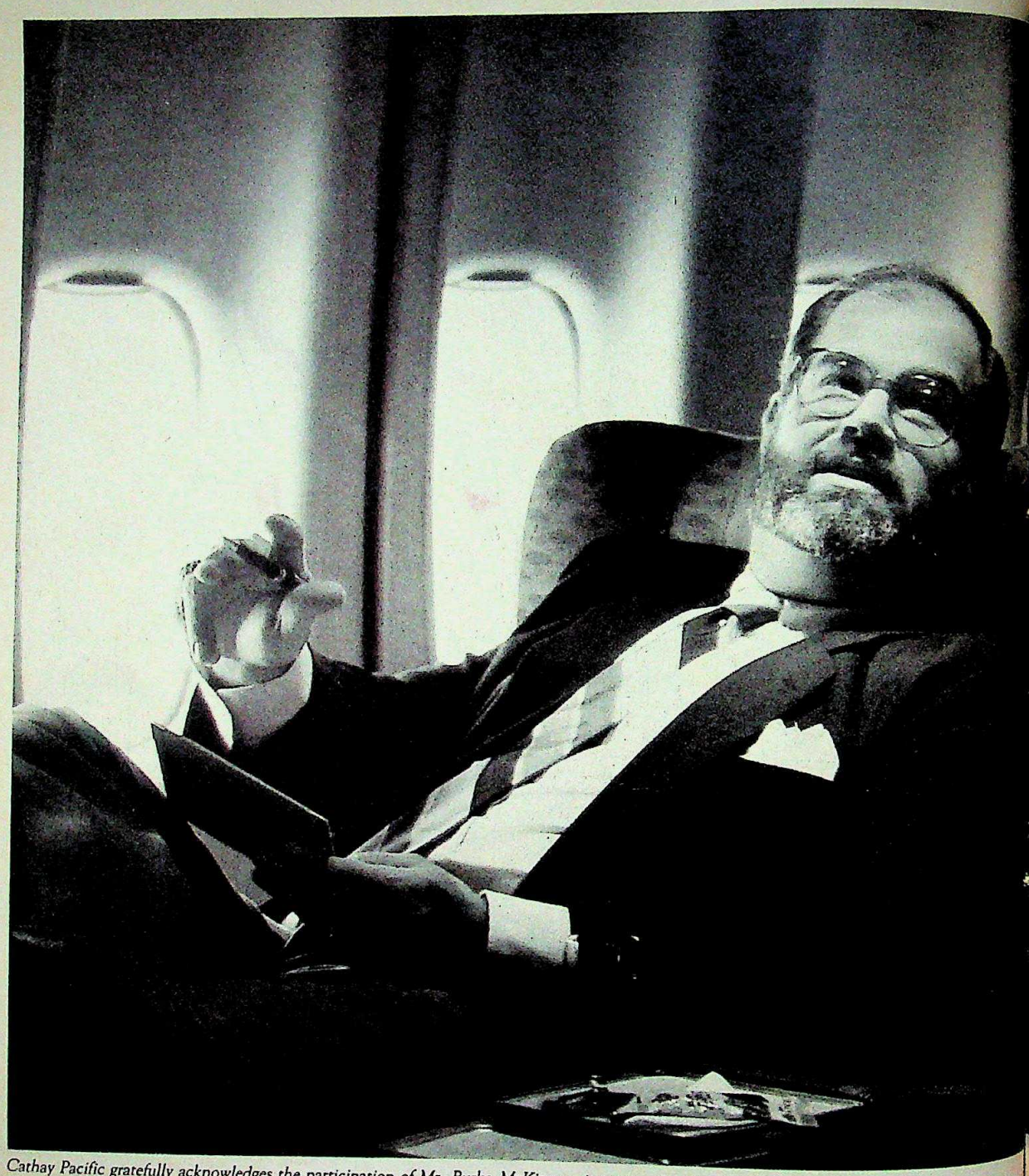

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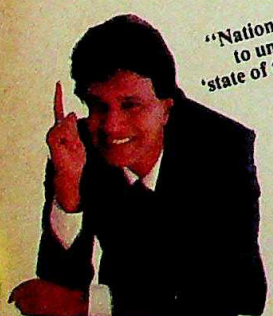

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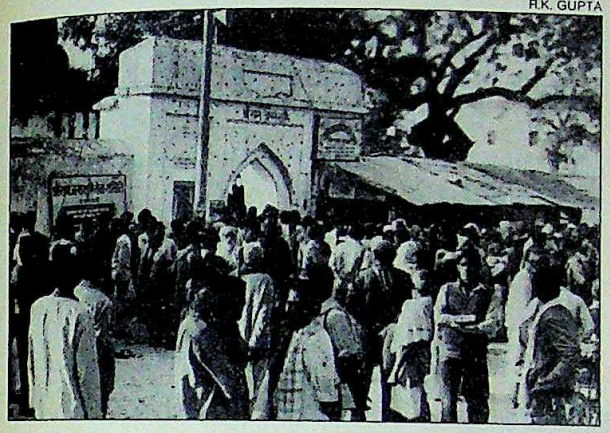
Communal Flare-up

FAIZABAD, the heart of the Ram Janmabhoomi and Babri Masjid controversy, experienced its first communal flare-up since the issue assumed tinderbox dimensions in February 1986. The twin towns of Ayodhya and Faizabad, with a significant 40 per cent Muslim population of a total 3.45 lakh, had defied logic and remained

R.K. GUPTA



Ram Janmabhoomi: disputed shrine

free from communal violence connected with the temple-mosque dispute. Though riots swept 24 Uttar Pradesh districts in February and March '86 following the unlocking of the temple, life in Faizabad remained unaffected.

This time, however, after riots engulfed three Uttar Pradesh towns during the October 8 bandh organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to protest the proposed Ayodhya march by the Muslims, tension had built up in Faizabad too.

On the evening of October 21 when the Muslims were holding a *milad* (religious congregation) in the town, a Bharat milap procession of the Hindus was passing through the same route under heavy police escort. The procession had just cleared the sensitive area when a mysterious bomb explosion occurred. With both sides well prepared for such an eventuality, brickbatting began and soon turned into a free for all. In the days that followed curfew was clamped, but violence continued with half a dozen people losing their lives in several different incidents of stabbing. The state Government remains on tenterhooks, worried that the communal violence in Faizabad may have wider ramifications.

Fasting for Funds

POLITICIANS are resorting to street battles in Andhra Pradesh. Last fortnight, Hyderabad Mayor Anumula Satyanarayana sat on a hunger strike for six days, two persons were killed and five injured in police firing before the state Government handed over cheques worth Rs 8.93 crore to the municipal corporation of Hyderabad to enable it to clear its dues. The local Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM)-controlled corporation is at loggerheads with the Government on its demands: powers to the corporation to execute drainage works; powers to collect profession tax and sanction works worth Rs 2 lakh; control over health centres, agriculture, animal husbandry, education and water works facilities in the city; a 20 per cent share of the annual collections of sales tax and excise; and a 90 per cent share of the profession tax, entry tax and motor vehicle tax. The Telugu Desam dismissed it as a 'political gimmick'. But on the fifth day of the fast, the MIM called for a *rasta roko* stir. Buses were set on fire and electricity sub-stations destroyed.

When the violence broke out, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao took the mayor's fast seriously and hurriedly announced the release of Rs 8.93 crore to the corporation. But an enraged Satyanarayana refused to call off the fast till the cheques were handed over. The president of the All India Council of Mayors, Mahendra Singh Saathi, intervened and persuaded Satyanarayana to call off the fast. Meanwhile, one of those injured in police firing during the October 10 violence died in hospital. During the course of the funeral procession fresh violence broke out. The police opened fire, killing one more person. Though the violence was contained, the MIM has become more strident in making its other demands. Says Satyanarayana: "We have given the Government a month's time to concede our demands. If they fail we will show them our strength."

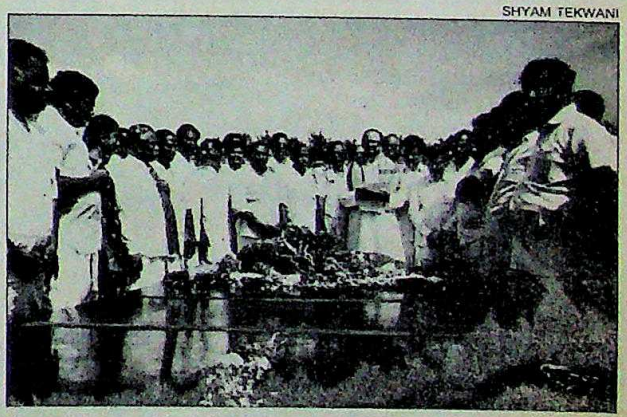
Memorial Designs

A year ago, they fought to stand at the head of MGR's body. Now, Jayalalitha Jayaraman and Janaki MGR are fighting over his tomb. Governor P.C. Alexander had earlier announced that a national contest would be held to select the best design for MGR's tomb. Yet, with his first death anniversary drawing near, the memorial seemed nowhere near completion.

Last fortnight, Jayalalitha decided that the issue merited public action. She charged that the Government had done little to expedite the construction of the memorial and appealed to followers to donate one rupee each so that it could be built.

Not one to be upstaged so easily, Janaki wrote to the governor that if necessary she would herself raise all the funds. The offer boomeranged. Where did Janaki come by the money she was offering, Jayalalitha wanted to know. The question alluded to Jayalalitha's long standing allegation that the money collected by the AIADMK for treating MGR in the US was swindled. The common man might have thought the whole

SHYAM TEKWANI



MGR's tomb: bitter contest

affair macabre if he were not chuckling all the while. The battles between the two have been gleefully termed *chakkalathi chandai* (a fight between the wife and the mistress). While the two women scrapped, Alexander explained the reason for the delay. "The national contest for the best design for the tomb is now over. By mid-November, the jurors will select the best design. It will be shown to Janaki because she is MGR's legal heir. Construction will begin immediately thereafter."

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AZAD PAPERS

Painful Disclosures

The much-awaited release, next week, of the unexpurgated version of Maulana Azad's India Wins Freedom *is certain to be a bombshell for the ruling party because it exposes the giants of the freedom struggle, including Jawaharlal Nehru, in unfavourable light.* INDIA TODAY *analyses the implications and reproduces extracts of the controversial manuscript.*

Even more explosive than the Diwali fireworks this fortnight might be the political fireworks. Publication of the full version of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's memoirs will certainly provide ammunition for detractors of the Nehru family. Coming out just a week before the Congress(I) goes to town with a glitzy celebration of the first prime minister's birth centenary, Azad's harsh criticism of Nehru will be highly embarrassing.

Tottering as it is on its tattered, patchwork platform, the ruling party has found it more and more expedient to hark back to the ancestry of its leader and the political legacy of Jawaharlal and Indira. The Government has contrived to dovetail the centenary with the 40th anniversary of Independence in order to project Nehru as the dominant pillar of nationalism.

Azad's point of view is diametrically opposite. He holds Nehru's naivety and gullibility responsible for the Partition of the country. The censored version had already criticised Nehru for twice insisting on the theoretically correct line instead of pragmatically accommodating the Muslim League in order to diffuse Muslim fears. The complete version is more strident. Azad firmly castigates Nehru for his "blunders" and repeatedly blames him for giving the League a handle with which to force Partition. Worse, he calls Nehru "impulsive and very amenable to personal influences"—specifically of the Mountbattens and Krishna Menon.

The speculation then was right on the dot. The pages were indeed suppressed to avoid embarrassing Nehru. However, the authors could not have calculated on his grandson being in his chair 30 years later. And if Azad's grandniece and Congress(I) MP, Najma Heptullah, was really trying to make up for this lack of prescience by stalling publication last February, she only ended up making things worse for her party. The timing is much worse now that it coincides with Nehru's centenary, than if the seals had been broken as stipulated on Azad's 30th death anniversary on February 22, 1988. Moreover, the publicity generated by the complex court battle and the continuing mystery have hugely increased interest in Azad's views—many of them highly subjective.

Heptullah had obtained a court stay against the unsealing last February, demanding details of royalty accounts for the already published version from publishers Orient Longman. Kabir had contracted with Longman in September 1958 to publish the censored version. The agreement also gave Longman "first right" to publish the full text of the papers in 1988.

Heptullah disputed Longman's prerogative, arguing among other things that Kabir had no right to enter into an agreement in the first place. She held that Azad's descendants

Azad (top) and Nehru

Patel and (centre) Mountbatten

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should now have the right to decide on publication—or further suppression. Though she had no idea what the manuscript contained, she might just have emerged with credit for saving her leader some political embarrassment. The attendant publicity was in any case welcome, as she has been in the political wilderness since she ceased to be deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha in 1986. That Heptullah found herself ranged against not only Longman but also Kabir's daughter, Jayati Leila, the press, and public opinion, should have come as no surprise. She was seen to be preventing the nation from access to its legacy.

Combining as he did erudite scholarship of Arabic and Urdu with a clear vision of secular unity, the Maulana had become one of the top five leaders of the freedom movement by the early '40s. Though his stern, patrician image did not make for populist charisma, his skill at maintaining political balance and his sturdy upright reputation through the previous two decades placed him among the possible contenders for leadership of free India. If Jinnah represented the politics of Muslim separatism, Nehru's was a vision of socialist development and Patel stood for a strong political centre with indigenous economic growth, Azad uncompromisingly stood on the platform of national unity—whatever compromises that might involve in developmental initiative or political strength. Azad would have been happy as long as the nation could just be held together, and he believed he could have managed it.

Indeed, the crux of what he held back in the early version was his bitter regret that he had given up his claim to the top job and, more so, that he had handed his mantle to Nehru and not Patel. Having steered Congress through the Quit India Movement and negotiations with the British Cabinet Mission from 1939 to 1945, Azad handed over Congress presidentship to Nehru in 1946, the year the incumbent was asked to form an interim government.

"I have regretted no action of mine so much," he says, as having demurred before the popular Congress demand "that I should be charged with the responsibility of launching free India on its course". He debunks the popular view that Gandhi backed Nehru. As Azad tells it, Gandhi "was not wholly pleased that I had proposed that Jawaharlal should succeed me. Perhaps he was somewhat inclined towards Sardar Patel". Azad is sure that Patel would not have given the Muslim League the chance Nehru did to repudiate the Cabinet Mission Plan. Envisaging League participation, the plan provided for highly autonomous provinces and a weak Centre. It was accepted by Congress in the teeth of fierce opposition from the 'Congress Socialists', with whom Nehru empathised.

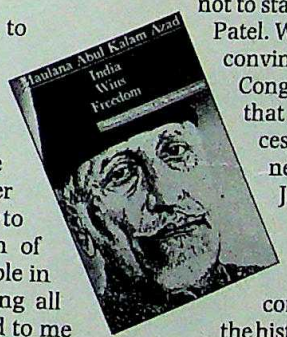
Azad is not, however, completely favourable to Patel. He records that Patel later became the first Congress convert to the two-nation theory after the frustrating experience of trying to work with the League in the interim government. "Jinnah may have raised the flag of Partition but now the real flag bearer was Patel". For this, as also for his deliberate failure to protect Muslims during the Partition riots, Azad cannot forgive Patel.

But the one who causes Azad real anguish is undoubtedly Nehru. Krishna Menon he can dismiss as dishonest, Purshottamdas Tandon's views don't deserve his respect, Mountbatten was vainly in search of a niche in history, but Nehru's blunders were unforgiveable. He was after all "one of my dearest friends", a trusted comrade whom he had himself placed at the helm. One can almost see the old man, his frail body still held erect, shed a quiet tear as he talks of his dream being shattered by his beloved friend's foolishness, as he thinks of the history that might have been. The following extracts from his memoirs, published for the first time in their original form, reveal the poignant anguish of a nationalist par excellence.

—DAVID DEVADAS

EXTRACTS

Nehru's Blunders



The next point which I had to decide was about the choice of my successor. I was anxious that the next president should be one who agreed with my point of view and would carry out the same policy as I had pursued. After weighing the pros and cons, I came to the conclusion that the election of Sardar Patel would not be desirable in the existing circumstances. Taking all facts into consideration, it seemed to me that Jawaharlal should be the new president. Accordingly, on April 26, 1946, I issued a statement proposing his name for the presidentship and appealing to Congressmen that they should elect Jawaharlal unanimously.

I acted according to my best judgement but the way things have shaped since then has made me realise that this was perhaps the greatest blunder of my political life. I have regretted no action of mine so much as the decision to withdraw from the presidentship of the Congress in this critical juncture. It was a mistake which I can describe in Gandhiji's words as one of Himalayan dimension.

My second mistake was that when I decided not to stand myself, I did not support Sardar Patel. We differed on many issues but I am convinced that if he had succeeded me as Congress President he would have seen that the Cabinet Mission Plan was successfully implemented. He would have never committed the mistake of Jawaharlal which gave Mr Jinnah the opportunity of sabotaging the plan. I can never forgive myself when I think that if I had not committed these mistakes, perhaps the history of the last ten years would have been different.

My statement caused a commotion among Congressmen all over the country. Several important leaders travelled from Calcutta, Bombay and Madras to persuade me to withdraw my statement and allow my name to be put up. Appeals in the press also appeared to the same effect. But I had already taken a decision and did not feel that I should change my view. One factor which gave greater strength to my decision was Gandhiji's view. He agreed with me that I should not continue as president but he was not wholly pleased that I had proposed that Jawaharlal should succeed me. Perhaps he was somewhat inclined towards Sardar Patel, but

The turn that events had taken made it almost impossible to expect a peaceful solution...between the Congress and the Muslim League...(and) a large part of the responsibility for this development rests with Jawaharlal.

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Gandhiji...was not wholly pleased that I had proposed that Jawaharlal should succeed me (as Congress president). Perhaps he was somewhat inclined towards Sardar Patel.

Nehru with Gandhi

once I had proposed Jawaharlal's name, he gave no public indication of his views. Some people did propose the names of Sardar Patel and Acharya Kripalani but in the end Jawaharlal was accepted unanimously.

Congress President

Now happened one of those unfortunate events which change the course of history. On July 10, Jawaharlal held a press conference in Bombay in which he made an astonishing statement. Some press representatives asked him whether, with the passing of the resolution by the AICC, the Congress had accepted the plan in toto, including the composition of the interim Government?

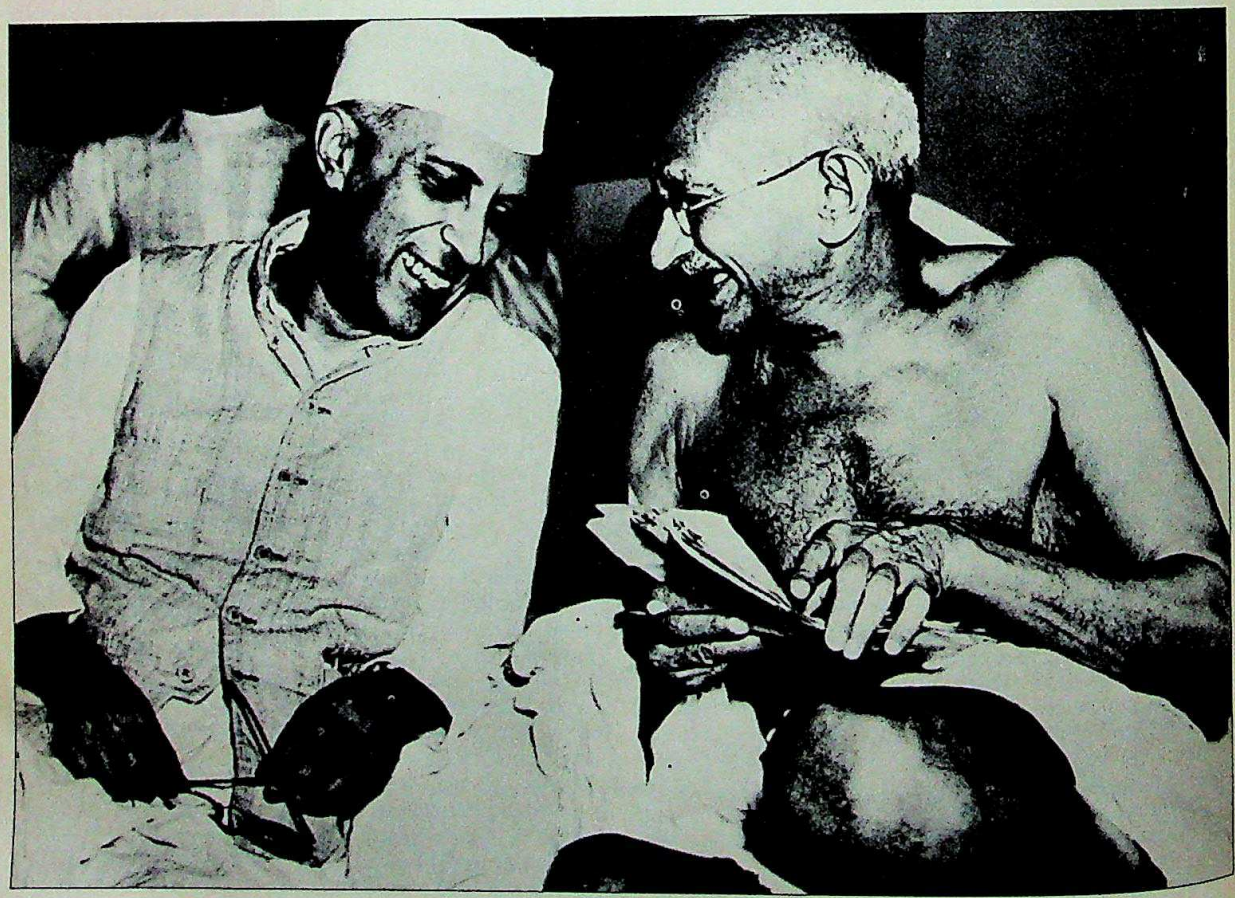
Jawaharlal in reply stated that the Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly "completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise."

Press representatives further asked if this meant that the Cabinet Mission Plan could be modified.

Jawaharlal replied emphatically that the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission Plan as it thought best.

The Muslim League had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan only under duress. Naturally Mr Jinnah was not very happy about it. In his speech to the League Council, he had clearly stated that he recommended acceptance only because nothing better could be obtained. His political adversaries started to criticise him by saying that he had failed to deliver the goods. They accused him that he had given up the idea of an independent Islamic state. They also taunted him that if the League was willing to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan—which denied the right of the Muslims to form a separate state—why had Mr Jinnah made so much fuss about an independent Islamic state?

Mr Jinnah was thus not at all happy about the outcome of the negotiations with the Cabinet Mission. Jawaharlal's statement came to him as a bombshell. He immediately issued a statement that this declaration by the Congress President demanded a review of the whole situation. He accordingly asked Liaqat Ali Khan to call a meeting of the League Council and issued a statement to the following effect. The Muslim League Council had accepted the Cabinet Mission Plan in Delhi as it was assured that the Congress also had accepted the scheme and the plan would be the basis of the future constitution of India. Now that the Congress



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President had declared that the Congress could change the scheme through its majority in the Constituent Assembly, this would mean that the minorities would be placed at the mercy of the majority. His view was that Jawaharlal's declaration meant that the Congress had rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan and as such the Viceroy should call upon the Muslim League which had accepted the plan to form the government.

The Muslim League Council met at Bombay on July 27. Mr Jinnah in his opening speech reiterated the demand for Pakistan as the only course left open to the Muslim League. After three days discussion, the Council passed a resolution rejecting the Cabinet Mission Plan. It also decided to resort to direct action for the achievement of Pakistan.

I was extremely perturbed by this new development. I saw that the scheme for which I had worked so hard was being destroyed through our own action. I felt that a meeting of the Working Committee must immediately be held to review the situation. Jawaharlal was not at first willing but when I insisted, he agreed. The Working Committee accordingly met on August 8 and reviewed the whole political situation. I pointed out that if we wanted to save the situation, we must make it clear that the statement of the Congress President at the Bombay press conference was his personal opinion and did not conform to the decision of the Congress. I explained that the view of the Congress was expressed by the resolution passed by the AICC and no individual, not even the Congress President, could change it. Jawaharlal argued that he had no objection if the Working Committee wanted to reiterate that the Cabinet Mission Plan has been accepted by the Congress, but felt that it would be embarrassing to the organisation and also to him personally if the Working Committee passed a resolution that the statement of the Congress President did not represent the policy of the Congress.

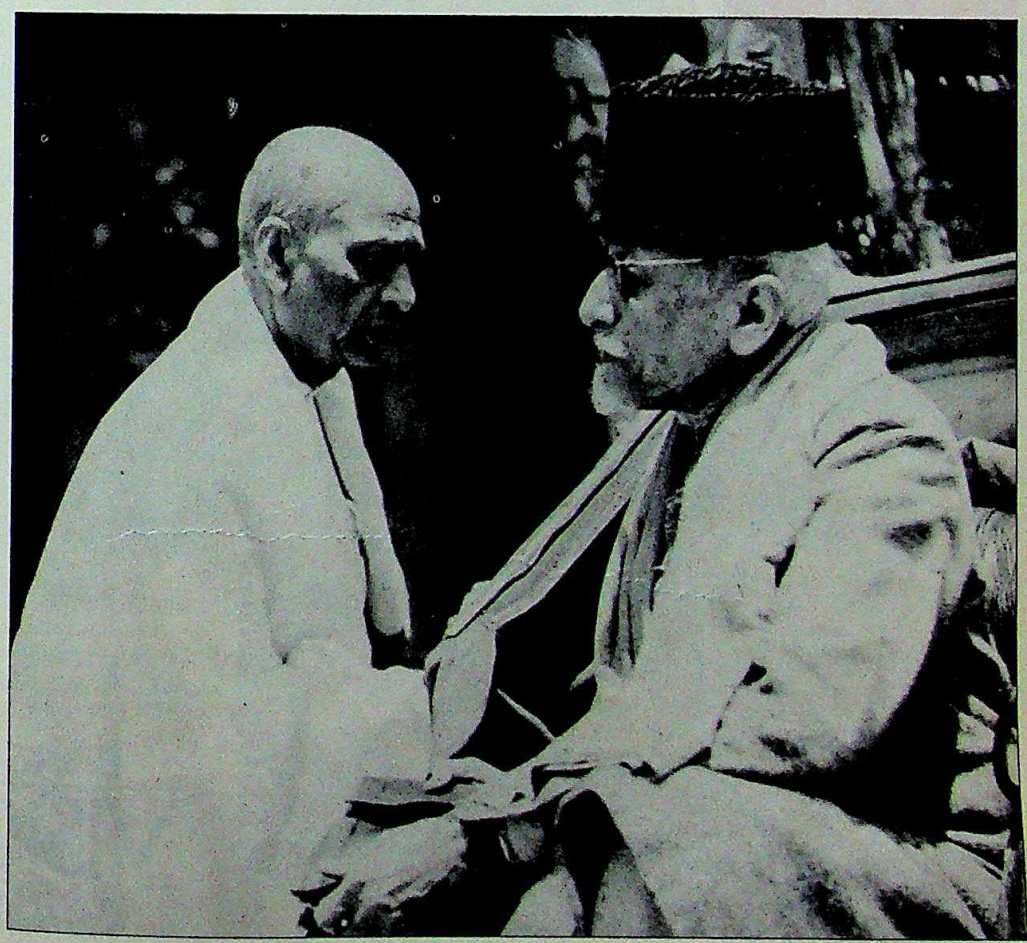
■ August 16, 1946, was a black day not only for Calcutta but for the whole of India. The turn that events had taken made it almost impossible to expect a peaceful solution by agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League. This was one of the greatest tragedies of Indian history and I have to say with the deepest of regret that a large part of the responsibility for this development rests with Jawaharlal. His unfortunate statement that the Congress would be free to modify the Cabinet Mission Plan re-opened the whole question of political and communal settlement. Mr Jinnah took full advantage of his mistake and withdrew from the League's early acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan.

Jawaharlal is one of my dearest friends and his contribution to India's national life is second to none. I have nevertheless to say with regret that this was not the first time that he did immense harm to the national cause. He had committed an almost equal blunder in 1937 when the first elections were held under the Government of India Act 1935. In these elections, the Muslim League had suffered a great setback throughout the country except in Bombay and the UP....

Chaudhari Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan were then the leaders of the Muslim League in the UP. When I came to Lucknow for forming the Government, I spoke to both of them. They assured me that not only would they

Sardar Patel was 50 per cent in favour of partition even before Mountbatten appeared....It would not perhaps be unfair to say that Vallabhbhai Patel was the founder of Indian partition.

Patel with Azad



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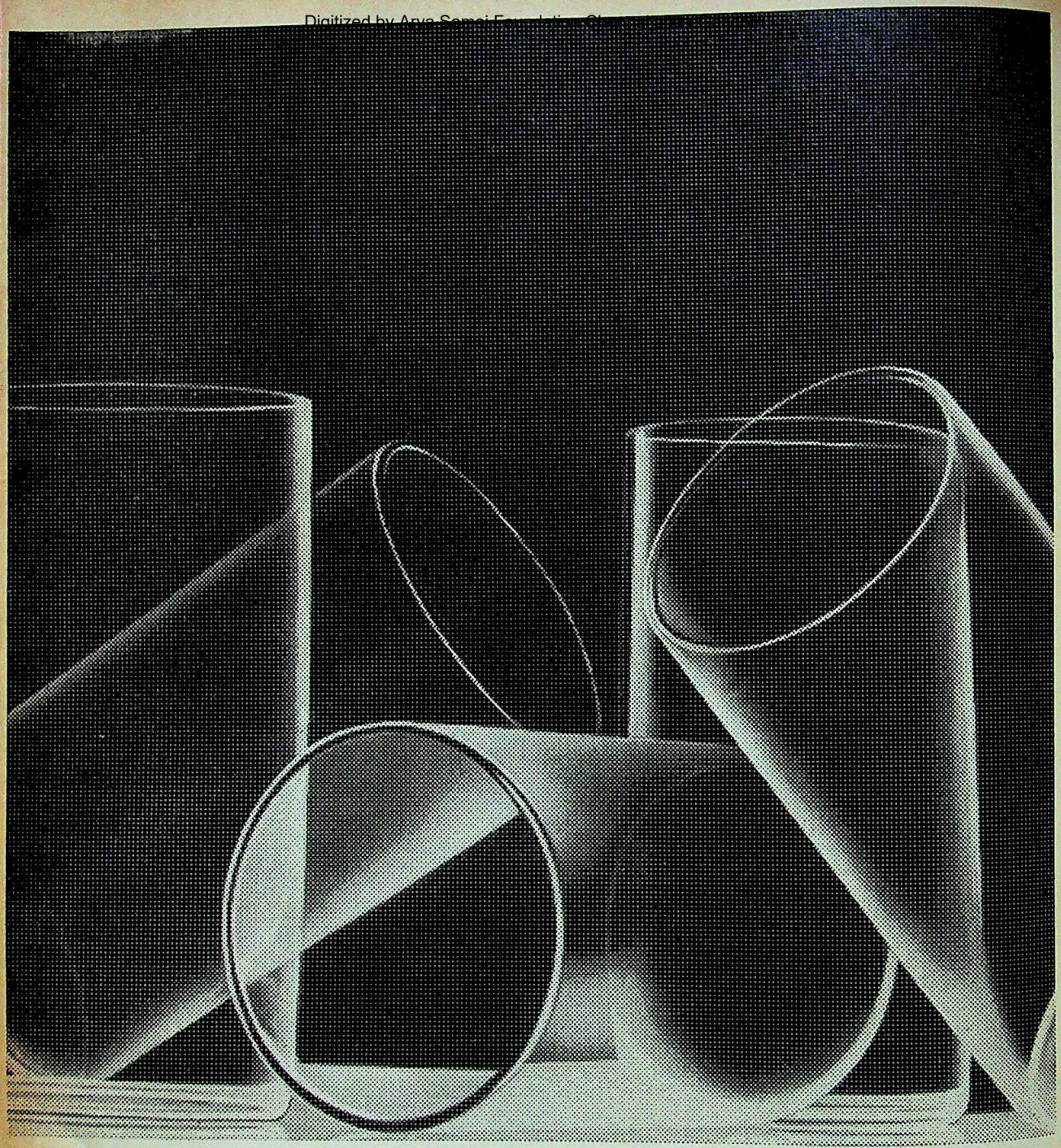

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cooperate with the Congress, but they would fully support the Congress programme. They naturally expected that the Muslim League would have some share in the new Government. The local position was such that neither of them could enter the Government alone. Either both would have to be taken or none. I had therefore held out hopes that both would be taken into the Government... and I left for Patna as my presence was necessary for forming the ministry in Bihar.

After some days, I returned to Allahabad and found to my great regret that Jawaharlal had written to Chaudhari Khaliquzzaman and Nawab Ismail Khan that only one of them could be taken into the ministry. He had said that the Muslim League party could decide who should be included but in the light of what I have said above, neither was in a position to come in alone. They therefore expressed their regret and said that they were unable to accept Jawaharlal's offer.

This was a most unfortunate development. If the League's offer of cooperation had been accepted, the Muslim League party would for all practical purposes merge in the Congress. Jawaharlal's action gave the Muslim League in the UP a new lease of life. All students of Indian politics know that it was from the UP that the League was re-organised. Mr Jinnah took full advantage of the situation and started an offensive which ultimately led to Pakistan.

Mountbatten Promotes Partition

A truly pathetic situation had developed as a result of our own foolish action in giving Finance to the Muslim League. Lord Mountbatten took full advantage of the situation. Because of the dissensions among the members, he slowly and gradually assumed full powers. He still kept up the form of a constitutional Governor-General but in fact he started to mediate between the Congress and the League and get his own way. He also began to give a new turn to the political problem and tried to impress on both the Congress and the Muslim League the inevitability of Pakistan. He pleaded in favour of Pakistan and sowed the seeds of the idea in the minds of the Congress members of the Executive Council....

He wanted to be remembered in history as the man who had solved the Indian problem. If the solution was in terms of a plan formulated by him, this would bring still greater credit to him.

■ I think one factor responsible for the change (in Nehru's attitude to partition) was the personality of Lady Mountbatten.

■ Lord Mountbatten gave me the impression that he was not going to London with a clear cut picture of partition nor had he given up completely the Cabinet Mission Plan. Later events made me change my estimate of the situation. The way he acted afterwards convinced me that he had already made up his mind and was going to London to persuade the British Cabinet to accept his plan of partition. His words were only meant to allay my doubts. He did not himself believe what he was telling me.

Patel Accepts Partition

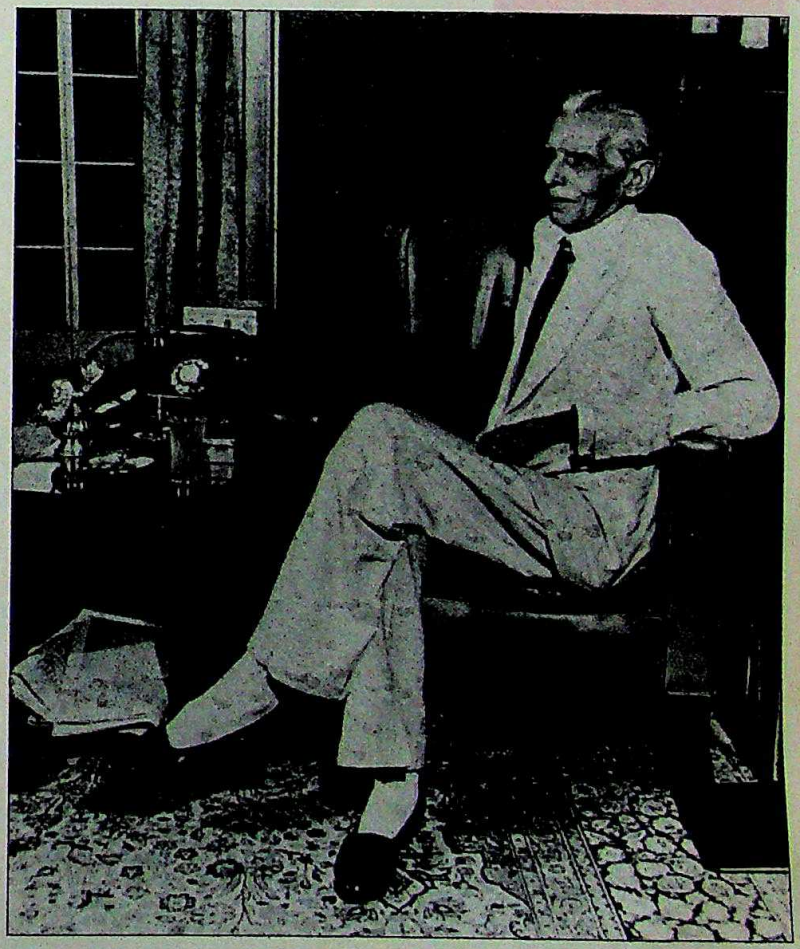
I was surprised that Patel was now an even greater supporter of the two nation theory than Jinnah. Jinnah may have raised the flag of partition but now the real flag bearer was Patel.

■ Sardar Patel was fifty per cent in favour of partition even before Lord Mountbatten appeared on the scene. He was convinced that he could not work with the Muslim League....He was prepared to have a part of India if only he could get rid of the Muslim League. It would not perhaps be unfair to say that Vallabhbhai Patel was the founder of Indian partition.

■ I argued that our second mistake arose when Lord Wavell suggested that the Home

We were becoming greater supporters of partition than Jinnah. I warned Jawaharlal that... the verdict would be that India was divided not by the Muslim League but by the Congress.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah



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portfolio may be given to the Muslim League. This would have not caused any insuperable difficulty but because Patel insisted on retaining Home, we had ourselves offered Finance to the Muslim League. This was the cause of our present difficulties. Now a situation had arisen where we were becoming greater supporters of partition than Jinnah. I warned Jawaharlal that history would never forgive us if we agreed to partition. The verdict would be that India was divided not by the Muslim League but by the Congress.

Krishna Menon's Dishonesty

We all like our admirers but perhaps Jawaharlal likes them a little more than others. Sometime later, in the early thirties, the Labour Party sent a delegation to India led by Miss Ellen Wilkinson. Krishna Menon was attached to the delegation and visited India. He had also been taking an interest in the activities of the India League in London. During this period, his contacts were mainly with people who were regarded as communists or fellow-travellers. When Jawaharlal went again to London, Krishna Menon renewed his contacts and reiterated his loyalty for Jawaharlal.

Mountbatten decided to become his patron. Krishna Menon had communist tendencies but when he saw that Mountbatten... might help him to get a position, he became pro-British overnight.

Nehru with Menon

When war broke out, Krishna Menon suggested that he should be provided with funds so that he could carry on propaganda in London on behalf of India. When Hitler attacked Russia, he came into touch with the Soviet Embassy in London. He sent us many messages that he was meeting the Soviet Ambassador as Jawaharlal's personal representative. He sent all kinds of proposals for securing the help of interests friendly to India. He also prepared schemes asking for funds from the Congress. Jawaharlal was impressed by him and requested me to grant some money. I did so and placed the matter before the Working Committee. Gandhiji and Sardar Patel told me frankly that they did not like my action but they would say nothing since I had paid the money in good faith. They however asked me not to make any further payment. They pointed out that Indians in London were sharply divided in their judgement about Krishna Menon. He had some supporters but there was a strong body of opponents who brought all kinds of charges against him. The general impression I got was that his conduct was not above approach. I could not therefore trust him fully. Later events proved that Gandhiji and Sardar were right in their suspicion of Krishna Menon. He was, to take a charitable view, unreliable and had little concern for the way public funds were spent. Most people took an even worse view and regarded him as downright dishonest.

When the interim Government was formed, Jawaharlal wanted to appoint Krishna Menon as the High Commissioner in London. Lord Wavell did not agree. The British Government also advised that his appointment would not be appropriate as he was regarded a fellow-traveller. Soon after Lord Wavell left, Krishna Menon came to India and stayed with Jawaharlal. Lord Mountbatten immediately perceived that Jawaharlal had a weakness for Krishna Menon and could be influenced by him. Lord Mountbatten decided to become his patron and invited him to the Viceroy's House on several occasions. Menon had communist tendencies but when he saw that Lord Mountbatten was friendly and might help him to get a position, he became pro-British overnight. He impressed Lord Mountbatten with his friendly feelings for the British. Lord Mountbatten felt that Menon would be useful in persuading Jawaharlal to accept his scheme of partition of India. It is my belief that Menon did influence Jawaharlal's mind on this question. I was not surprised when sometime later I learnt that Lord Mountbatten offered to support Jawaharlal if he wanted to appoint Menon as the High Commissioner in London.

INDIA WINS FREEDOM BY ABUL KALAM AZAD: ORIENT LONGMAN: PRICE: RS 75

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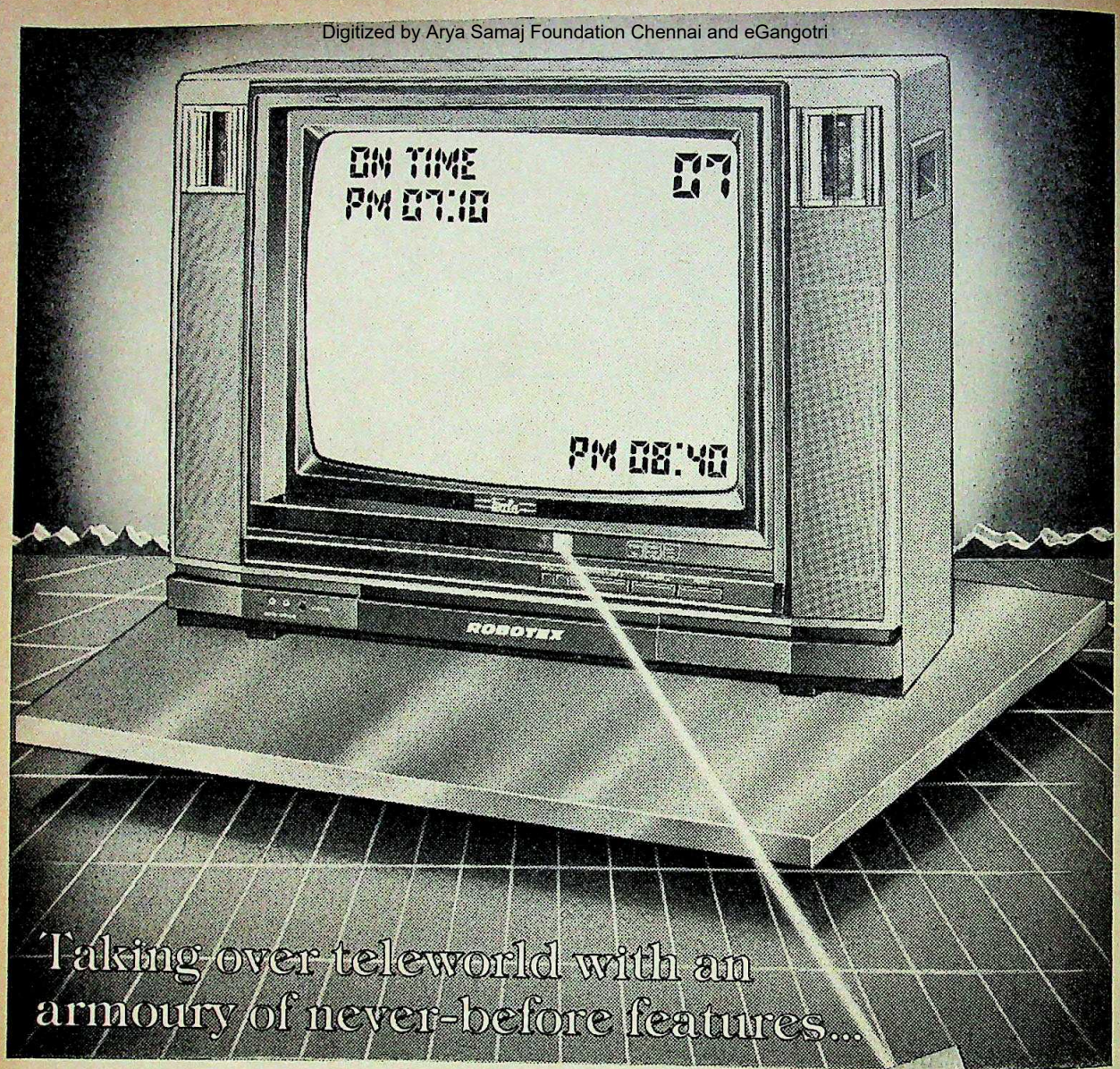

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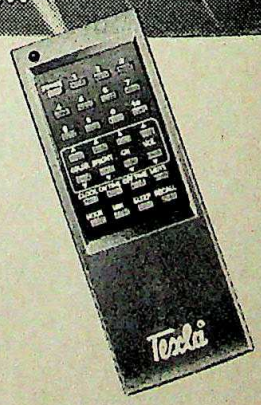

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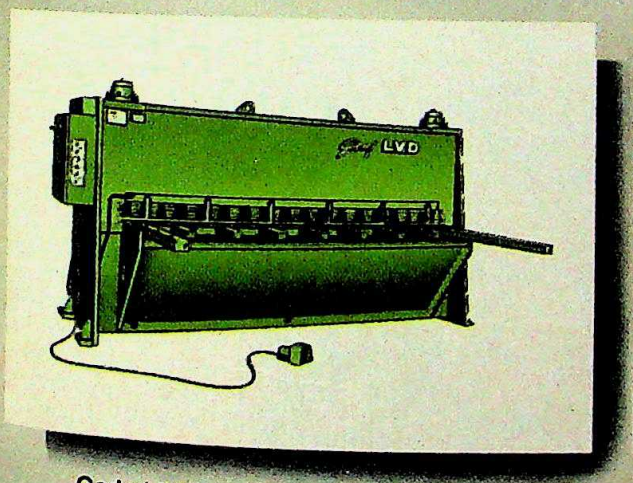

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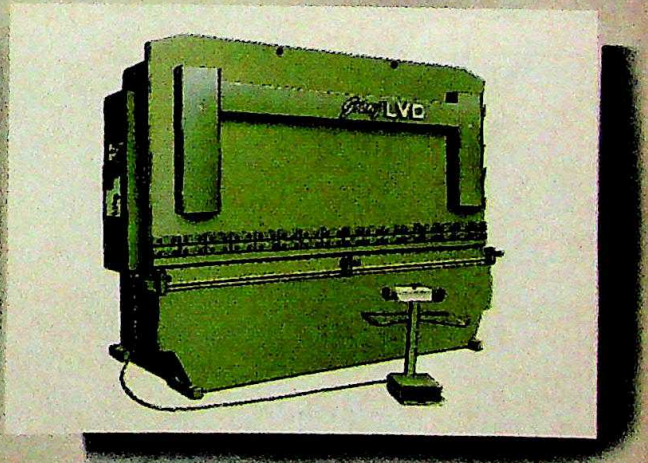

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US ELECTIONS

Shallow Theatrics, Cynical Rhetoric

America yawns through a smear campaign

AT a recent fund-raising dinner for the Catholic Church in New York, Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis wistfully remarked that if the ensuing election race were to be decided "by a nose" then he would be the next president of the United States.

Dukakis was jokingly referring to his somewhat prominent nasal endowment. But if the election-eve opinion polls are to be believed, he would need a nose a yard long to overtake Republican rival George Bush by November 8. Sadly for Dukakis, just some weeks ago, he was looking down the same nose at the trailing Bush.

Even in the free-for-all atmosphere of American hustings, the current presidential electioneering has touched a record low in the level of political debate, and a dizzy high in expenditure: more than $100 million in "official" expenditure and perhaps an equal amount indirectly through state units of the Democratic and Republican parties. Of this, a whopping $46 million came from the public treasury for each candidate.

The candidates' frequent recourse to shallow theatrics and cynical rhetoric have together kept outgoing President Ronald Reagan's popularity at a high level. Bush has surged ahead in opinion polls by keeping the focus on areas that have little to do with substantial issues—such as branding his opponent "liberal", pro-abortion and weak-kneed. Dukakis, on the other hand, mouthed tedious statistics about his past achievements as governor of Massachusetts.

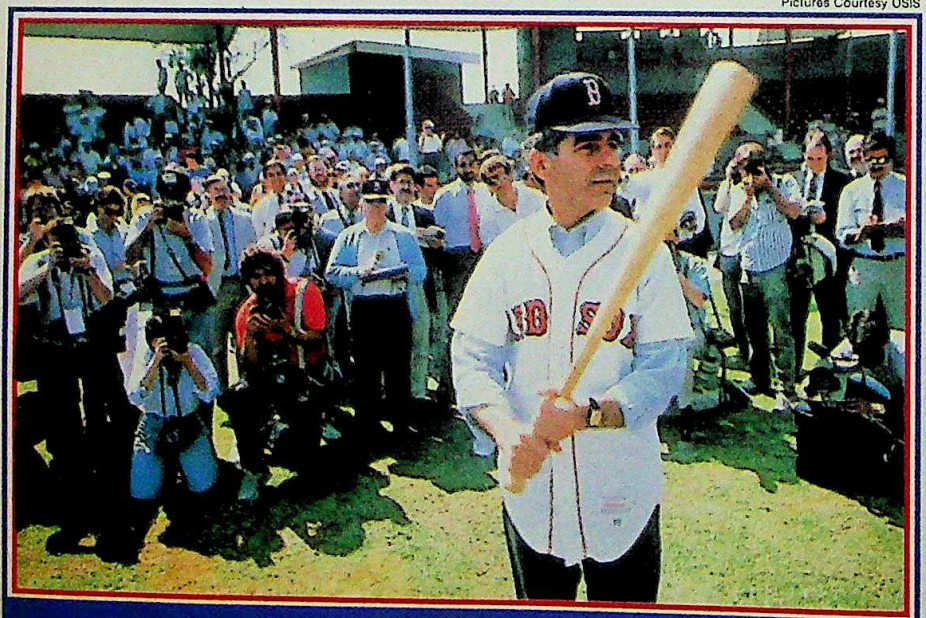
A fortnight before polling day, Bush had a lead over Dukakis that ranged from 7 to 17 points, depending on which opinion poll you looked at. The polls, however, were unanimous that the south and south-west—including the crucial state of Texas—were solidly behind Bush. This is particularly bitter news for Dukakis because he had picked the Texan senator Lloyd Bentsen as his vice-presidential running mate just to neutralise Bush in that state. But as Bentsen is simultaneously running for re-election to the Senate, his loyal supporters can now vote both for Bush as president and for him as senator. Past records show that no Democratic candidate has ever made it to the White House without carrying Texas.

Even Bush's running mate Dan Quayle—once thought to be his Achilles' heel—has stopped being a "drag factor". His undistinguished background, poor grasp of facts and frequent gaffes had only recently threatened to make the young senator from Indiana a millstone around Bush's neck. But by making him virtually invisible in most of the country and stepping up the negative attacks on Dukakis, Bush's campaign managers have been able to blunt most of the Democratic fire-power directed at Quayle.

Though Bush is going strong, Dukakis certainly cannot be counted out. He has solid support among the blacks and other minorities, voters of the north-east and the powerful Jewish community (his wife Kitty is Jewish). He has fought some strenuous rearguard battles against the Bush forces in the last few days. He has also finally attempted to spotlight real issues and pinpoint gaping holes in his opponent's record—particularly Bush's poor performance in combating the flood of drugs that is drowning this nation and pushing up heinous crimes. Paradoxically, the perception of Dukakis as the underdog may cost Bush votes among those who habitually "give to the needy".

The only thing which can be stated with certainty, therefore, is that the electorate has yawned through this presidential campaign—raising fears that no more than 52 per cent will actually bother to vote. An extraordinary number of potential voters has

Pictures Courtesy USIS



Though he is trailing in the latest opinion polls, Dukakis certainly cannot be counted out of the presidential race as yet.

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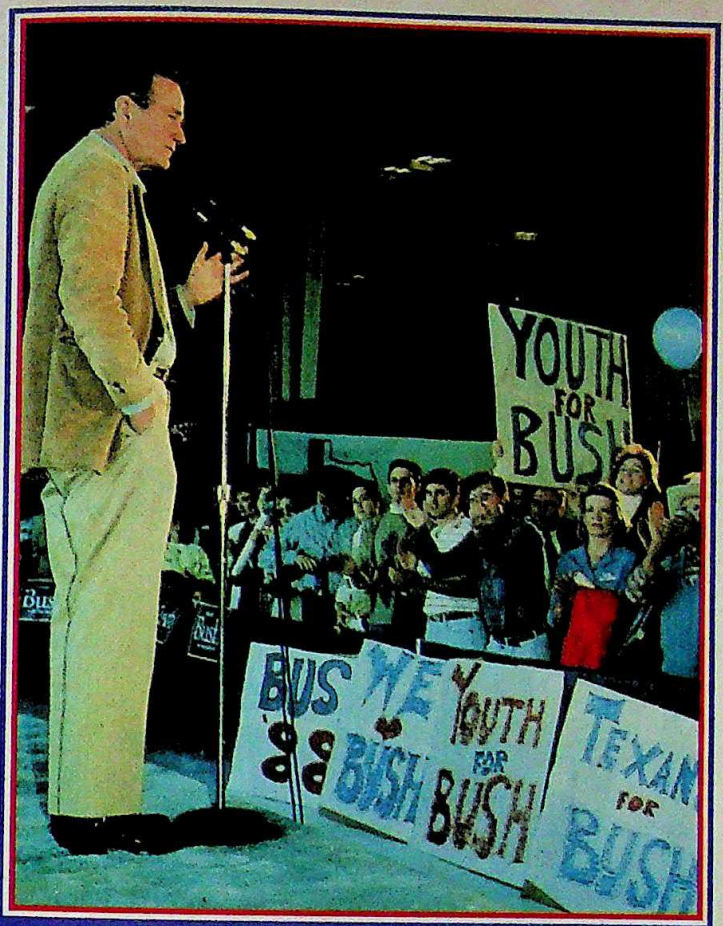
ers has lambasted both candidates for a singular lack of inspiring utterances and clear agenda. Criticism has also spotlighted the candidates' complete dependence on advisors, who now control schedules, appearances, speeches, interviews and attire. They even advise candidates on facial expressions.

As campaign managers now present the next president of the superpower in 20-second television "bytes", the debate on the media's role in the political process has again been sparked off. The frightening importance of televison has been repeatedly highlighted by wide swings in opinion polls after televised appearances of the candidates. Little wonder then that both Bush and Dukakis have retained nearly three-fourths of their huge budgets for TV advertising blitzes in the last three weeks before the elections. The ridiculous extent to which presidential polls seem to be affected by the visual media is also seen in the scramble to enrol "media handlers" at colossal costs. (There should be a parallel lesson here about what the Government's control of Doordarshan must be doing to the Indian democratic process).

But the real issues confronting America cannot simply be wished away—despite the candidates' best attempts to sidestep them. Problems like the massive budget and trade deficits, pollution and drugs, have become too corrosive even for the Reagan-style "teflon" treatment. The next occupant of the White House will have little choice but to tackle these issues head-on, bringing to an end the unrealistic sense of well-being created by eight years of Reagan rhetoric. Curiously, this anticipated political upheaval is causing some traditional Democrats to favour a vote for Bush—in the hope that Republicans will reap so much ill will in the next four years that Democrats will win overwhelmingly in 1992.



Bush has surged ahead by keeping his focus on areas that have little to do with substantial issues.

For the rest of the world too, the likely policies of the next US president have great significance. The American economy is still the biggest single factor in world trade while US military and foreign policy has influence far beyond its own borders. What the next president perceives to be US strategic interests will affect countries thousands of miles away. The world is waiting to see whether Reagan's successor will first set his own house in order or run away from domestic problems by starting bush fires in other countries.

Notwithstanding the unquestioned support to Dukakis by most Indian residents in the US, there is no hard evidence to indicate that relations with India will improve under him. Indeed, according to Paul Kreisberg, an expert on South Asia, there are areas where a Democratic president could get tougher with India than a Republican president. For instance, a Democratic White House is expected to step up pressure on both India and Pakistan to halt their nuclear programmes and sign the non-proliferation treaty. All the same, Indian interests might be served better by a Democratic president as he is likely to be more willing to cut defence spending—thus reducing US aid now being poured into Pakistan. Most of the non-military policies now determining Indo-US relations would, however, remain intact under either candidate.

While relations with India might not be altered dramatically, the US itself is at the crossroads. As the Reagan bubble has burst, Americans have been confronted with a blast of reality—the economic strength of Japan, the emergence of a powerful Soviet statesman in Gorbachev, and the massive budget deficit which all threaten US dominance.

The only thing which can be predicted with any certainty is that the next president of America will have to strive very hard to restore the buoyant mood that characterised most of the Reagan era.

—AMRIT KAKARIA in New York

Bentsen (left) and Quayle: inconsequential

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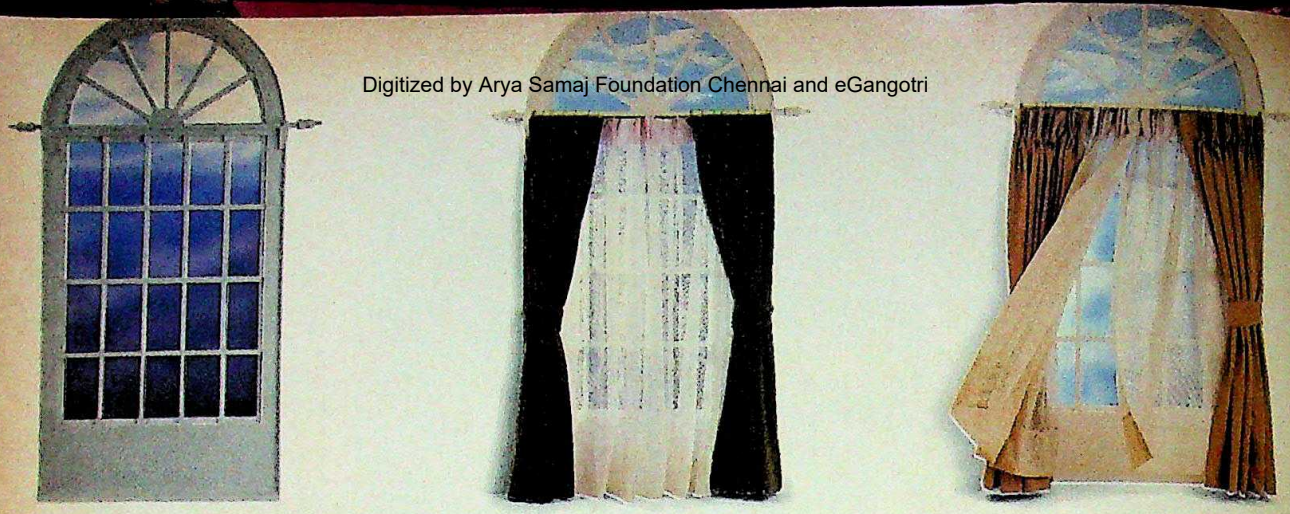

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DILUTED STAKE

RASESH Mafatlal has hawked his 6 per cent equity in National Organic Chemical Industries Ltd (NOCIL) to the financial institutions. The unreported deal was concluded several months ago, for a price that's in the vicinity of Rs 4.5 crore. As a result, the stake of the institutions in the Bombay-based chemical company has gone up from about 23 to 29 per cent. Mafatlal Industries, controlled by brother Arvind Mafatlal, owns around 14 per cent of NOCIL's equity, while petroleum giant Shell International owns 33 per cent. The remainder is held by the public. Mafatlal Industries sources maintain that they are not worried by the increased institutional stake because Mafatlal Industries and Shell together hold 47 per cent of NOCIL's equity.

POWERFUL PROPOSAL

FOLLOWING their acquisition of 40 per cent of Ashok Leyland's foreign equity in October 1987, the Hindujas have been trying to establish a bigger presence in India. Now, in a letter to the Planning Commission, Gopichand Hinduja has offered to put up power plants—in collaboration with Bechtel Corporation of the US—on a "build, operate and transfer" basis. As per this concept, an international consortium builds the plant with its own money, operates it for a specified period of time at a guaranteed minimum level of capacity utilisation, and hands it over "free" to a government agency—on condition that it is allowed to repatriate profits and interest in hard currency. Four years ago, a consortium of C. Itoh of Japan, Kuljian Corporation of the US and the Calcutta-based Development Consultants Pvt Ltd had put up a similar proposal for West Bengal's Bakreshwar power plant, but the Finance Ministry objected to repatriation of profits. Whether it will change its position now is to be seen.

AMBITIOUS PLANS

DESPITE the bitter feuds in the Modi family, at least one Modi enterprise is busily drawing up ambitious diversification plans. K.K. Modi's Godfrey Phillips India (GPI) has sought government approval to move into real estate, tea and processed foods. GPI has already opened four retail tea outlets in the capital, but is now seeking to export blended tea. So the cigarette manufacturer is talking to some European concerns on a marketing tie-up. The Rs 2-crore project is expected to bring in sales of Rs 18.50 crore. The real estate venture is more ambitious. GPI proposes to initially put up multi-storeyed houses on land it already owns in Bombay, and later to purchase and develop land. Estimated sales for the real estate project: Rs 100 crore.

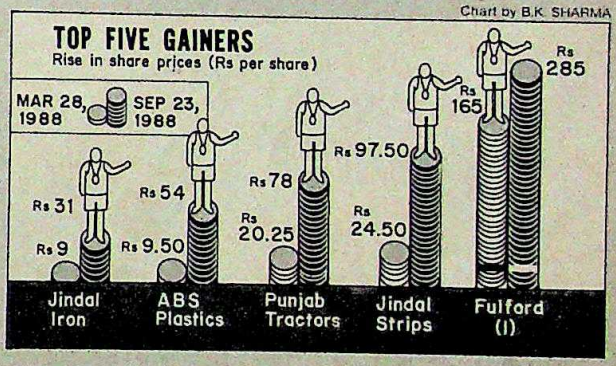
BITTER TASTE

SEVERAL months ago, Dilip Piramal's Blowplast had made a foray into marketing pens and producing canned juices, but both projects have been dogged by problems. Blowplast hawked pens made by small businessmen (pens are reserved for the small sector) but suppliers couldn't keep pace when sales volumes shot up. And Great Taste juices have not exactly been a runaway success. Faced with red ink, the moulded luggage manufacturer will now wind down its pens division, while its Great Taste is only to be exported or sold to bulk buyers, instead of to the public. Clearly, diversification need not always have the sweet taste of success.

UP, UP AND AWAY

THE stock-market is booming and share indices are going through the roof. In line with these developments, share prices have soared to stratospheric heights. But is the price rise confined to shares that traditionally set the pace in the stock-market, or is it more broad based? To find some answers, the Bombay Stock Exchange recently studied the prices of 354 actively traded scrips between March 28 and

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



September 23, 1988. The study discovered that the price of as many as 323 scrips had shot up, with 10 of them gaining by over 200 per cent. These include ABS Plastics, Jindal Strips, Punjab Tractors, Fulford (I), National Rayon and Cipla. (The steep percentage increase is accounted for by the low base price in some cases—*see chart*). The share prices of market leaders like Reliance Industries and Telco rose by a more modest 171 per cent and 66 per cent respectively. Only 31 shares depreciated in value. The stock exchange's conclusion: the boom is real, and embraces a wide spectrum of shares.

COMMANDING PRESENCE

AFTER successfully bagging Union Carbide India Ltd's closed petrochemicals unit at Chembur in Bombay (price: Rs 58.5 crore), Abhey Oswal is negotiating with the State Bank of India to take over an adjacent polyvinyl chloride (PVC), caustic soda and PVC compounds unit. Promoted by Ilac Ltd, a Calico subsidiary, the plant piled up losses of about Rs 38 crore, including penal interest. The State Bank and the Gujarat State Industrial Development Corporation later took it over, and it has been shut for nearly three years. Evidently, Oswal is eyeing the plant's 30,000-tonne production capacity. Along with the Carbide plant, this will lend him a commanding presence in the petrochemicals market. But Oswal has declined to foot the penal interest and the outcome of the talks will be known in a month's time.

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RELIANCE AND L&T

A Grand Alliance

With the acquisition, the Ambanis are readying to go full speed ahead

SITTING behind his expansive desk at his office a day before he leaves for a five-week business trip to South America and Europe, 64-year-old Larsen & Toubro (L&T) Chairman N.M. Desai is fairly confident. Yes, L&T will continue to operate as a separate entity. And yes, the Ambanis will play a supportive role.

A couple of kilometres away, the assessment at the plush headquarters of Reliance Industries is slightly different. L&T is the synthetic textile giant's first corporate acquisition (the Ambanis had made an abortive bid for Union Carbide India's Bombay plant in 1985)—and the Ambanis will shepherd it closely. "Obviously, Reliance will be deeply involved in L&T," says a Reliance spokesman.

The perceptions on the future differ, but there's little doubt on one score: Reliance Industries Chairman Dhirubhai Ambani has pulled off the coup of the decade. Last month, his eldest son Mukesh and lawyer M.L. Bhakta—both of whom sit on Reliance's board of directors—joined the 17-member board of the Rs 660-crore engineering, cement, shipping and construction enterprise. The L&T board had decided to invite both on to the board in late September, but Desai publicly announced the decision at the shareholders' meeting.

That lay to rest months of intense speculation over who precisely had been buying L&T stock. Dubai-based corporate raider Manu Chhabria had picked up roughly 1 per cent of the company's equity from the market in August 1987. The Ambanis followed suit barely months later, getting into high gear between August and September this year (*see chart*). They finally acquired 12.4 per cent of L&T equity, paying Rs 75 crore to Rs 80 crore.

Oddly, the L&T management maintained all the while that it was not aware of who had been doing the buying, because the shares had not been presented for entry in the shareholders' register.

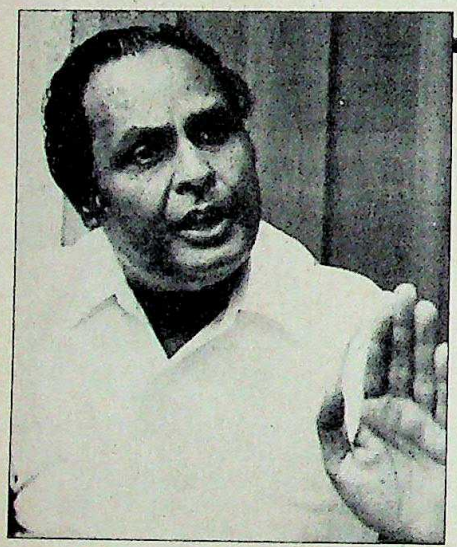
Even so, Desai knew that the company was being stalked. Last year, the management discreetly employed a Bombay-based firm of investment counsellors to come up with a defensive strategy to fend off Chhabria. The firm fed the management with daily reports on L&T share buying. It also suggested two defensive options: offer 10 per cent of the company's stock to employees, or ask a "white knight" or friendly company to buy into L&T. The Government raised technical objections to the first plan, leaving L&T with the alternative of a friendly bidder.

Desai would have preferred not to rope in anyone. "We were quite happy by ourselves," says he. But he argues that changes in company law have made it obligatory for managements to register share transfers—so limiting L&T's options. "The board of directors doesn't have much choice in deciding whether it wants a particular shareholder or not. If someone decides to come in, can you really do something?" asks Desai.

Well, yes. A management can always rope in a white knight—which is what Desai ultimately did. He seems to have been alarmed at the prospect of Chhabria gaining control of L&T. In fact, the two met for tea at a mutual friend's house quite some months ago. According to Desai, Chhabria asked: "Do you mind if I buy L&T shares?" Desai replied: "Go ahead." Chhabria then reportedly asked him: "Are you happy or unhappy?" Desai apparently said: "Does that matter?"

Ambani sounded Desai a bit more obliquely almost a year ago, and got a warmer reception. The two knew each other well, Reliance and L&T had a seven-year business relationship and an alliance seemed workable. Last January, Desai took L&T's directors into confidence.

That left the financial institutions.



Thanks to Larsen & Toubro Chairman N.M. Desai's desire to ward off a hostile takeover and the Government's tacit blessings, Reliance Industries Chairman Dhirubhai Ambani has pulled off the coup of the decade.

NAMAS BHOJANI

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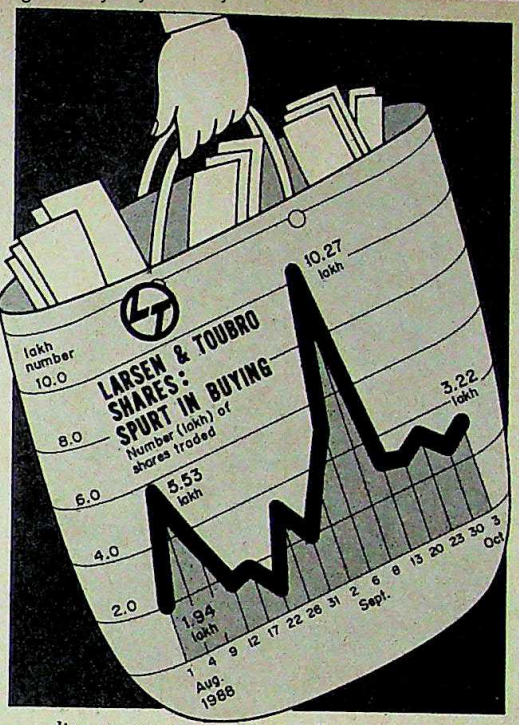
which have a majority stake of over 40 per cent in L&T. The influential Ambanis sounded them out a couple of months ago, and they raised no objections (the chairman of one institution said that L&T lacked "zip" and had not in the past seized opportunities to take over companies presented to it on a platter). Finally, the Ambanis informally obtained the clearance of the Finance Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office. The way was then cleared for the grand alliance between the two companies.

The road to it was perhaps not as smooth as this suggests. Critics of the deal allege that Desai succumbed to the Ambanis too easily. After all, they say, he had told colleagues at a lunch held at a five-star hotel last year that the management would fight raiders to the bitter end. The uncharitable even suggest that the Ambanis offered Desai certain blandishments, including a promise that he'd stay on as chairman (Desai's term expires on March 31, 1989).

Asked whether he'd like to stay on, Desai said: "I don't know. To be frank with you, I'd like to retire." But Reliance sources do not rule out a fresh term for Desai. "Why not? He's made the company number one in construction and one of the best switchgear companies in the country," said a source.

Even if Desai continues, he may play a less active role. For one, L&T Vice-President P.R.R. Subramaniam has been named as managing director and president. For another, although Desai insists that the Ambanis have their hands full in managing Reliance, the Ambanis have indicated that they will be heavily involved in L&T. Two more board positions will fall vacant next year as a result of retirements, and Reliance may well demand that it be allowed to fill these slots.

Whatever the case, there's little doubt that Reliance sees the engineering and construction company as a prized acquisition. Certainly, it takes Reliance up the corporate ranks (*see chart*). One investment analyst in Bombay believes that the Ambanis have set themselves the ambitious goal of overtaking the Tatas in the next few years—something the Reliance source says is simply not true.



Nonetheless, this would certainly be the time to go full speed ahead. The political climate is clearly favourable for the ambitious entrepreneurs, and it would be to their advantage to make hay while the sun shines. General elections next year could well bring back storm clouds and threaten their heady growth.

While that may explain the big Reliance push now, putting up Reliance Petrochemicals will involve huge project contracts. L&T can be expected to bag many of them if it quotes marginally less than it would have otherwise—and the textile giant will save at least Rs 50 crore.

The Ambanis have a great deal of respect for L&T's fabrication shop at Hazira, for its personnel training department. And the company's presence in cement, electronics and construction fits in neatly with Reliance's long-term plans. "We looked at the export market," says the Reliance source. "The reconstruction of Iran and Iraq will begin. The Government is talking of building infrastructure, and we looked at that."

Reliance has also submitted an application to the Government to put up a Rs 1,000-crore integrated steel plant, leaving the choice of the location to the Government. The Government would have to amend its industrial policy to permit the private sector to enter what has so far been a public sector preserve, and the application may or may not sail through. If it doesn't, Reliance will perhaps seek to set up the plant in the Gulf and export steel to India. L&T's construction experience will come into play here.

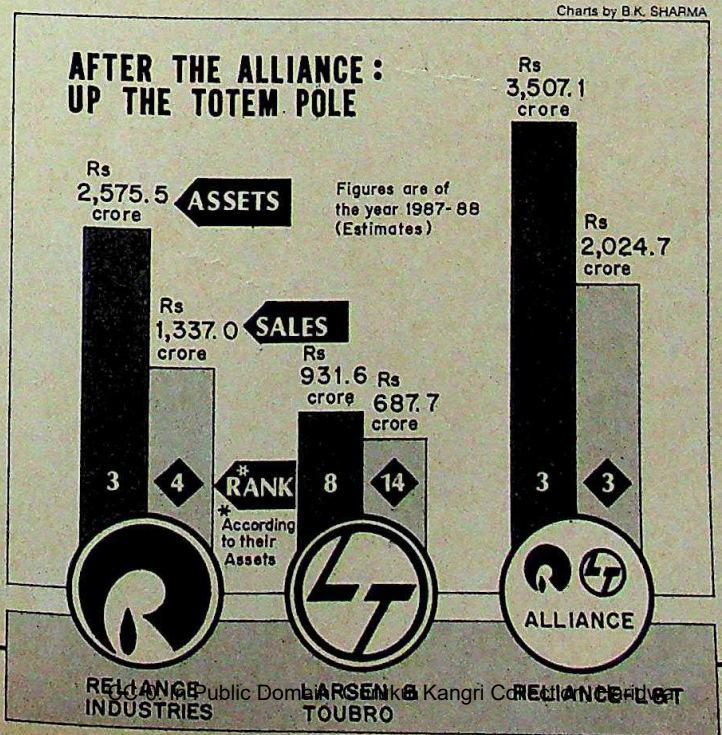
Meanwhile, a report in a financial daily sparked off speculation that the Ambanis were cornering Siemens shares. Both Siemens and Reliance, however, quickly issued a joint press statement denying this. Reliance is the biggest private sector customer of Siemens but, as Siemens Managing Director Albert Hoser points out, "the L&T situation is quite different. Here Siemens AG has 51 per cent. We're in the core sector and don't need to dilute equity."

According to Hoser, 25,000 Siemens shares changed hands. The company has private Indian shareholders, the Kapadias being the biggest of them with a 2.09 per cent stake. Some members of the Kapadia family hawked shares to cash in on the high share price. Confirming this, Siemens board member N.N. Kapadia adds: "They'll buy back shares when prices go down."

That still doesn't clarify who picked up the shares. What is instead clear is that the Ambanis are embarking on an ambitious new growth phase—and seem unstoppable.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI in Bombay

Charts by B.K. SHARMA



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RPG ENTERPRISES

Back in Business

Despite set-backs, the group has expansion plans

AT his palatial house in Calcutta's Alipur, where more than one millionaire has his home, he sits patiently, his knees crossed. His room is lined with wooden cabinets, plush arm chairs, and glass-panelled show cases packed with books. These include *The Complete Works of Aurobindo*, a book on 500 top companies of the future and, surprisingly, books on water management.

Rama Prasad Goenka is not young—he declines to reveal his age—but he's still as sharp as ever. True, he's left the hands-on operations in RPG Enterprises—the Rs 1,100-crore (minus Dunlop India) stable of cable, tyre, pharmaceutical and plantation companies—to sons Harsh and Sanjeev. But in the autumn of his life, Goenka is heavily involved in chalking out a long-term strategy for the group, busily planning forays into the high-technology world of electronics, food processing, biotechnology and, yes, water management. "We have chosen areas in which demand will boom in the near future, where profits will be high and where the products manufactured will be needed by our sister concerns," says he.

What is also striking is that two years after he took over the losing Gramophone Company of India, the guru of take-overs is stalking companies once more. Last fortnight, RPG Enterprises signed a memorandum of understanding to take over Raychem, the new Indian subsidiary of the US defence electronics, telecommunications and pipeline coating giant Raychem—pipping perhaps the Tatas, the Birlas, the Modis and Asian Paints to the post.

The latest acquisition tops an entry into plantation company Harrisons Malayalam and computer concern International Computers Indian Manufacture (ICIM). Goenka had also sounded out ICI of the UK on acquiring a stake in its Indian subsidiary IEL, but the Rs 150-crore price-tag proved to be too expensive. "Yes, I went to England to meet ICI officials," admitted Goenka. "But that was all."

Clearly, the gambit is to both shop for companies and set up new enterprises as quickly as possible. Goenka's youngest son Sanjeev confirms this when he says: "We will use a mix of two methods. One is to set up new units with public and foreign equity participation. The other is to buy companies which fit into our future lines of business, whenever the opportunity arises."

(From left) Sanjeev, Rama Prasad and Harsh Goenka: two-pronged strategy

Unquestionably, the flurry of activity in the group is prompted by shrinking sales and the poor performance of some companies in the Goenka stable. The Gramophone Company, for example, has been badly losing money (though it made a profit for the first time last month). Wiltech India, the blade concern set up in collaboration with Wilkinson Sword of the UK, is still in the red, with losses of Rs 2.84 crore in 1987, despite numerous advertisement campaigns to bolster the image of the product in the market.

The biggest blow to the group is the loss of tyre giant Dunlop to the Chhabrias. With sales of Rs 430 crore and assets worth Rs 347 crore, Dunlop was a prized possession. Together with Ceat, Dunlop gave the Goenkas a 42 per cent share of the Indian tyre market. Equally important, it provided Sanjeev Goenka, who has been the deputy managing director of Dunlop, with an industrial base (he has, however, now taken over as the executive vice-chairman of Harrisons Malayalam).

The Goenkas had acquired a stake in Dunlop along with the Chhabrias four years ago, but the alliance broke down on the suspicion that money was being funnelled out of the company. Said Kishore Chhabria, who now sits in the driver's seat at Dunlop: "It is not possible for two ambitious people to work together when they have different ideas. So they will be relinquishing their shares which they bought from BTR (which holds the Dunlop India shares) in our favour."

That means that the RPG group's sales will shrink by a third (though this will be marginally offset by the acquisition of Harrisons Malayalam and ICIM). Last fortnight, Sanjeev flew to the UK in a last-ditch effort to persuade the

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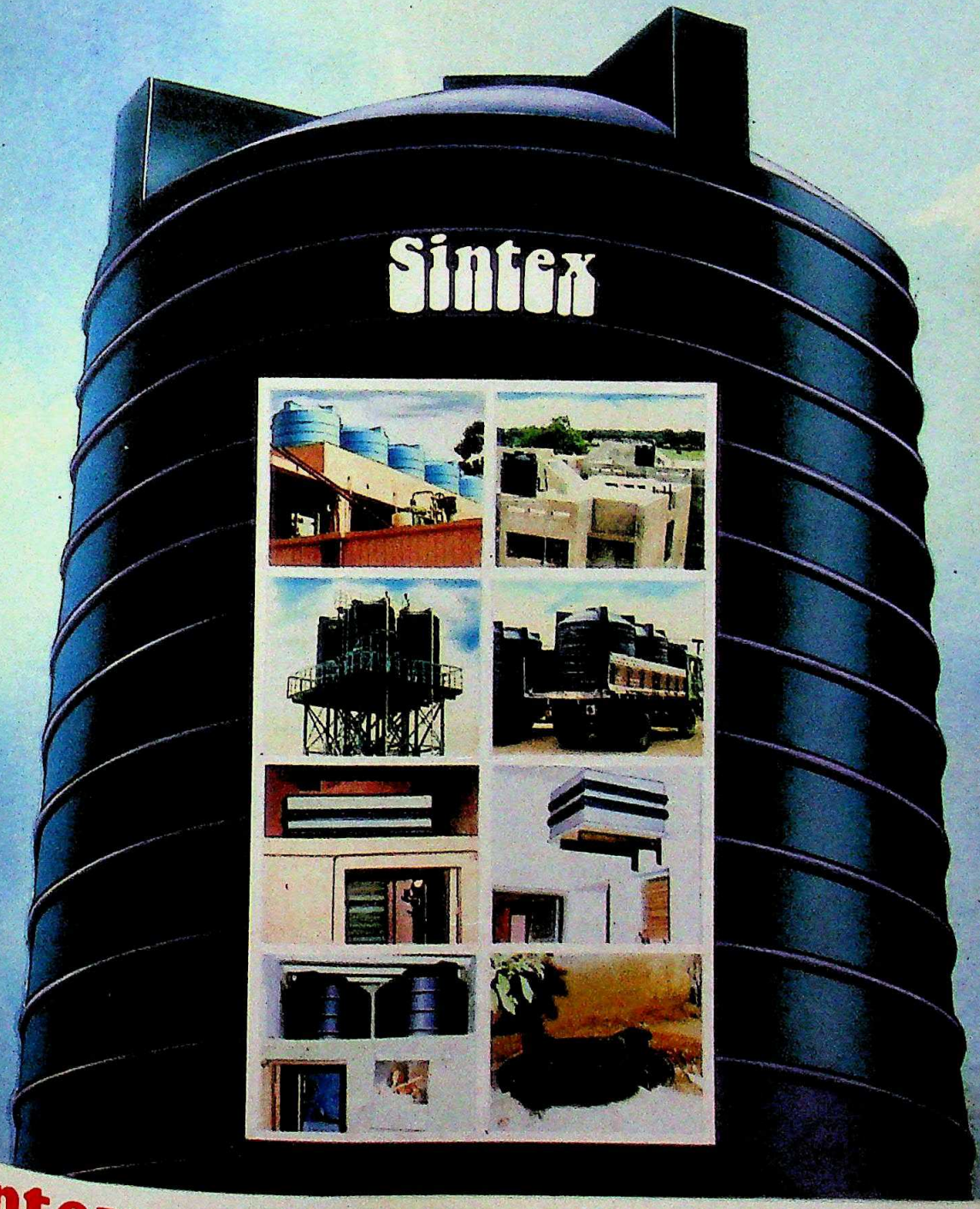

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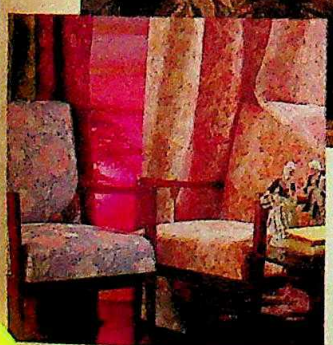

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At **Khajuraho**, the mastery of the craftsmen who translated mere stone into beauty and grace left us spellbound.

John and Susan couldn't wait to meet a tiger face to face. They did at **Kanha and Bandhavgarh**. We also met deer, bison, nilgai and colourful birds.

At **Sanchi**, one could almost hear the peace... I had great fun explaining the Jataka Tales depicted on the Stupa gates to John and Susan.

And the prehistoric rock paintings at **Bhimbetka** have been executed by different artists of several different civilisations over several centuries!

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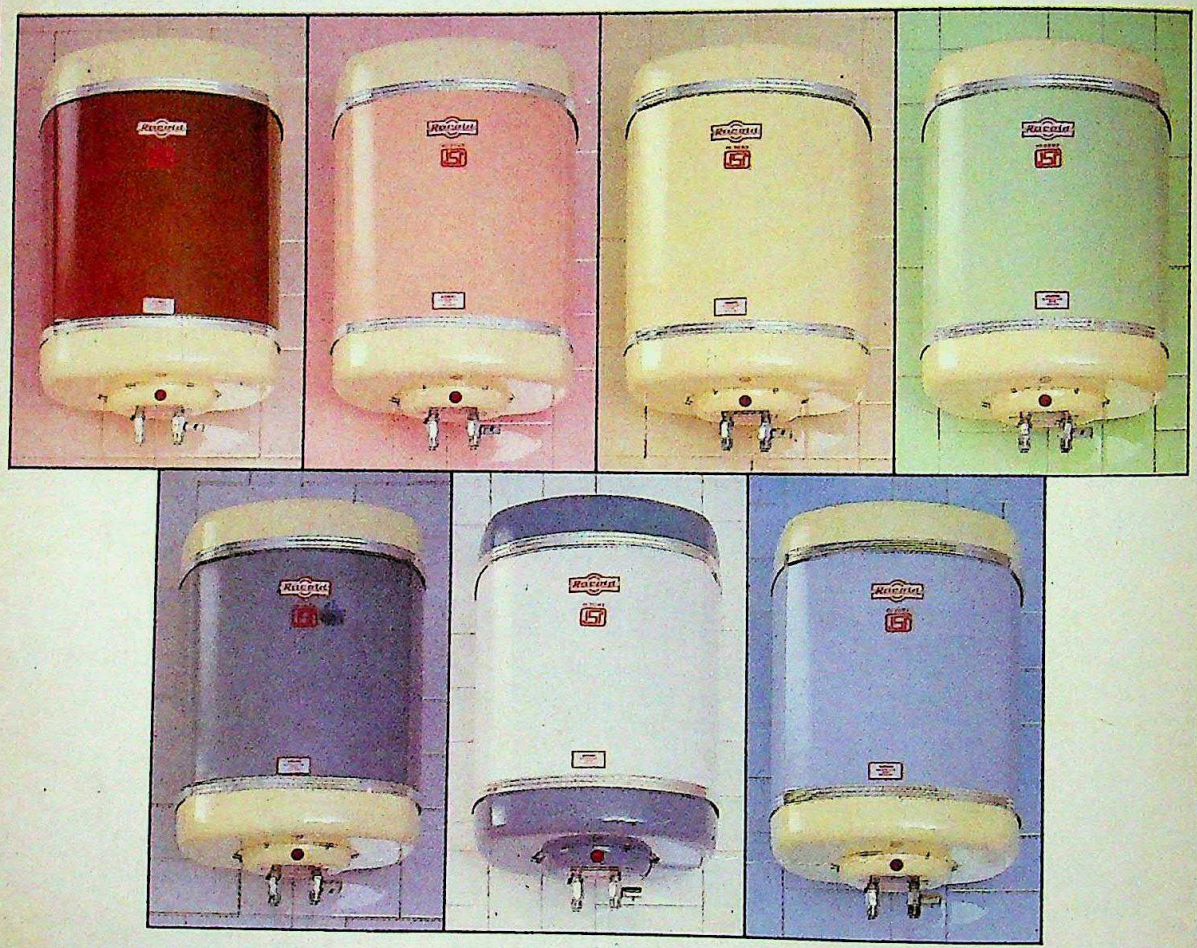

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British parent of Dunlop to support him, rather than the Chhabrias.

There have been other disappointments as well. The Centre has stalled the Rs 1,470-crore Haldia Petrochemicals project, a joint venture with the West Bengal Government, for almost seven years. The project may now be scaled down, with the ethylene portion postponed and downstream products taken up first using imported ethylene. The project's delay in turn probably delayed the ambitious expansion plans of the Goenkas. "We were keeping resources for Haldia," says Harsh, who is now chairman of RPG Enterprises. "But we can not keep on waiting endlessly."

Cash is the key to growth, and the Goenka war chests are filled to the brim. In a classic understatement, R.P. Goenka says: "Cash is not the problem." The sale of the 7 per cent Goenka stake—5 per cent was bought overseas, and the Reserve Bank has declined to clear the purchase—to the Chhabrias is expected to net the group between Rs 10 crore and Rs 21 crore, depending on its bargaining strength. Moreover, as a leading Calcutta stock broker who represents big business points out: "R.P. has the ability to cough up Rs 25 crore with a week's notice. He has a lot of money invested in government securities, portfolio management and promissory notes which will be available to him for the asking."

He seems to be rustling up the cash for a bevy of exciting new projects. Among them:

▶ A Rs 10-crore water management project, in collaboration with 11 foreign companies. A new company is to be floated for the purpose, which will manufacture and supply sewage treatment plants to governments and municipal corporations, convert sea water into drinking water, and provide consultancy services. "It's a pioneering area—and there's a lot of profit," says R.P. Goenka.

▶ A biotechnology venture. Land is being acquired in Hyderabad, Lucknow, Pune and Delhi. The name of the game is tissue culture, and the aim is to hawk to farmers high yielding, quick maturing mango, orange and pineapple seeds and plants—for starters. "Mangoes take seven years to mature. Through tissue culture, the time can be reduced to just three years," says Goenka.

▶ Units to process pineapples, mangoes, apples, coffee and tea with foreign know-how. In the main, the idea is to export juices and packaged tea.

▶ A high-yielding oilseeds project, on the lines of tobacco giant ITC's foray into oilseeds. The Goenkas are now scouting around for a collaborator for the project. The group is to invest approximately Rs 125 crore in the food processing and oilseeds projects.

All this is evidently part of a carefully thought out growth strategy. The move into tissue culture is obviously linked to the ambitious food and oilseeds ventures. Stepping into Harrisons Malayalam also makes eminent sense. Rubber is scarce, and rubber prices have shot up by about 40 per cent in the last two years. And although Harsh Goenka insists that "we look at each business as independent," the group's entry into plantations will undoubtedly assure Ceat of regular rubber supplies.

So also, ICIM will provide the big push into electronics. The Goenkas have signed an agreement with ICIM's UK principal International Computers Ltd (ICL), under which they are to be offered the chairmanship of the Indian company and jointly participate with ICL in managing it. The British company will continue to hold 40 per cent of the equity, but the Goenkas are to acquire about 10 per cent of the shares either through a share issue or by buying a block of shares from private Indian shareholders or the financial institutions.

Along with ICIM the Goenkas are making other forays into electronics. For instance, Norplex Oaks is tying up with Allied Signals of the US to turn out printed circuit boards. Even the much neglected Murphy India is spending Rs 15 crore on a diversification programme. This month, it will unveil a new range of audio products and, later, television sets.

Other projects are coming up too: a Rs 35-crore petrochemicals venture in Tamil Nadu; a Rs 15-crore diesel generator manufacturing unit in collaboration with Sulzer in Pune; and a Rs 120-crore nylon tyre chord project in Madhya Pradesh.

Undoubtedly, many of these will help put the group on the path to quick growth. Still, the Goenkas are only too aware that ICIM is plagued with problems (excess staff, a dearth of government orders for its mainframe computers, and an expected Rs 3 crore loss this year). They may have taken on more than they had bargained for.

The Goenkas also face tax problems. After an embarrassing tax raid some months ago, revenue officials claimed that a Goenka company had concealed Rs 17 crore in income. According to tax officials, they've now sent the group a show cause notice involving over Rs 2 crore.

That may be a blot on the Goenka record. Still, R.P. Goenka remains philosophical. "There are always ups and downs in business." And with all the new projects on the anvil, the way seems to point up for RPG Enterprises.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Calcutta
with bureau reports

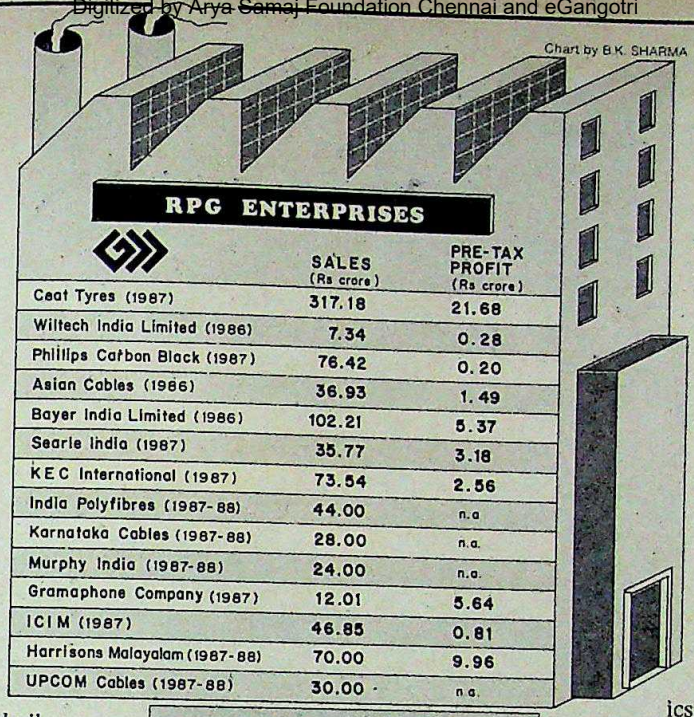

Chart by B.K. SHARMA

RPG ENTERPRISES

	SALES (Rs crore)	PRE-TAX PROFIT (Rs crore)
Ceat Tyres (1987)	317.18	21.68
Wiltech India Limited (1986)	7.34	0.28
Phillips Carbon Black (1987)	76.42	0.20
Asian Cables (1986)	36.93	1.49
Bayer India Limited (1986)	102.21	5.37
Searle India (1987)	35.77	3.18
KEC International (1987)	73.54	2.56
India Polyfibres (1987-88)	44.00	n.a
Karnataka Cables (1987-88)	28.00	n.a.
Murphy India (1987-88)	24.00	n.a.
Gramaphone Company (1987)	12.01	5.64
ICIM (1987)	46.85	0.81
Harrisons Malayalam (1987-88)	70.00	9.96
UPCOM Cables (1987-88)	30.00	n.a.

The guru of take-overs is stalking companies once more as well as setting up new enterprises.

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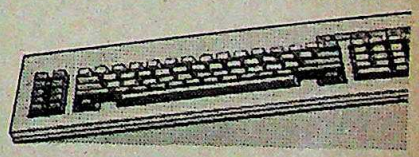

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UNIVERSAL LUGGAGE

Monopoly Move

Blow Plast buys up a rival

NEARLY 15 years ago, moulded luggage industry pioneer Jal S. Engineer hawked Blowplast, the company he founded, to industrialist Dilip G. Piramal. The feisty Engineer then went on to help set up a rival concern, Universal Luggage Manufacturing Company (better known for its Aristocrat brand name). In a bruising price discount war, the two slogged it out in the market-place for nearly six years.

Last fortnight, history was replayed. Engineer, now 65, sold Quality Plastics, a small shell company that holds the controlling interest in the Rs 58-crore Universal Luggage and three ancillary units to—surprise, surprise—Piramal and his associates. Price: Rs 4.17 crore.

In a sense, that's cheap. Apart from further slimming the competition in an industry that has seen a number of exits, the alliance means that Blowplast (which makes VIP luggage) and Universal will together control at least 80 per cent of the Rs 200-crore organised sector moulded luggage market, raising the spectre of their dictating prices to the consumer. "The whole purpose of the takeover was to improve profitability and control the market," says Sumatichandra H. Mehta, chairman and managing director of Safari Industries (expected sales this year: Rs 25 crore), which ranks third in the industry. Even so, Mehta maintains that his firm with its lower production costs faces no threat from the new alliance.

Engineer stresses the point that legal provisions relating to monopoly will not come into play. "Both of us are in the plastics industry, and our share of the plastics market is less than 5 per cent. If the luggage industry is taken into account, all trunks and leather bags will have to be included." And Piramal insists that government permission is not required for the deal and that his personal stake in the shell company is small (under 25 per cent). "Both companies will be independent and will compete as before," says Piramal. "We're not interested in raising prices. We won't be able to sell if we do."

There's little doubt that, on balance, Piramal has struck a good deal. Universal's modest profits had steadily risen (*see chart*) till 1986-87, when it dipped into the red by Rs 4.09 crore after a crippling labour strike and price cuts. But the company turned the corner last year, making a pre-tax profit of Rs 2.24 crore.

Why then did Engineer decide to pull out? He explains: "I'd lost Rs 30 lakh after the strike in three satellite companies to pay wages in accordance with government decisions. That's a big blow to any family's pocket." He also adds: "We are pulling out to stop the price war. At last the shareholders will benefit."

As Engineer tells it, he first sounded Blowplast Chairman and Managing Director Piramal nearly 18 months ago on ending the price discounts. Both sides have been furiously trying to undercut each other, so much so that discounts to dealers shot up from 3 per cent in 1984 to 22 per cent last year. At the retail level, customers were offered more than 40 per cent discounts. Notes Piramal: "There's a lot of confusion in the consumer's mind. When he sees discounts of 25 to 30 per cent, he thinks something is fishy."

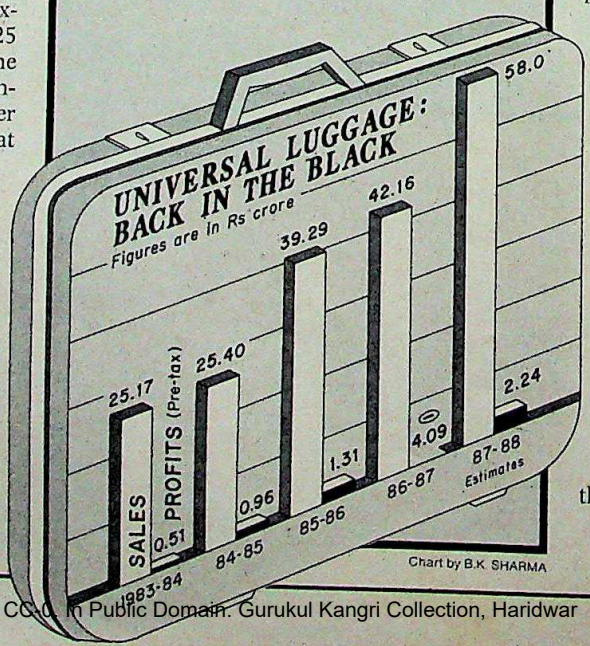
Curiously, both Piramal and Engineer blame Shashi S. Dash, a senior executive who worked for both their companies, for initiating the price wars. "Dash started the war," charges Engineer. "Our turnover went up, but profits remained the same." Counters Dash: "That's not true. If that's so, how could Universal make a profit last year? The losses were made when I wasn't there." About Blowplast, he added: "My stance was a market expanding stance, not a price cutting stance. They're looking for a scapegoat."

Whatever the truth of this, last July Engineer and Piramal agreed that one of them should buy out the other. "I didn't have the money," says Engineer. Piramal and his partners did. Engineer demanded Rs 5.40 crore, Piramal offered Rs 4.17 crore, and for a while it looked as if the deal wouldn't go through. Engineer finally caved in.

Interestingly, when Piramal bought Blowplast from Engineer, he obtained an undertaking that Engineer would not launch a luggage unit. Engineer admits he did just that after former employees approached him for help in rehabilitating themselves. This time round, Piramal has obtained an iron-clad undertaking from him that he would not enter the luggage industry for almost 10 years. "It's impossible for anyone to come in now," says Engineer, adding, "I'll start making something else." He just might—without the baggage of the past.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
in Bombay

The deal between Jal Engineer and Dilip Piramal will bring to an end the bruising price discount wars between the VIP and Aristocrat brands which have buffeted the luggage market for nearly six years.



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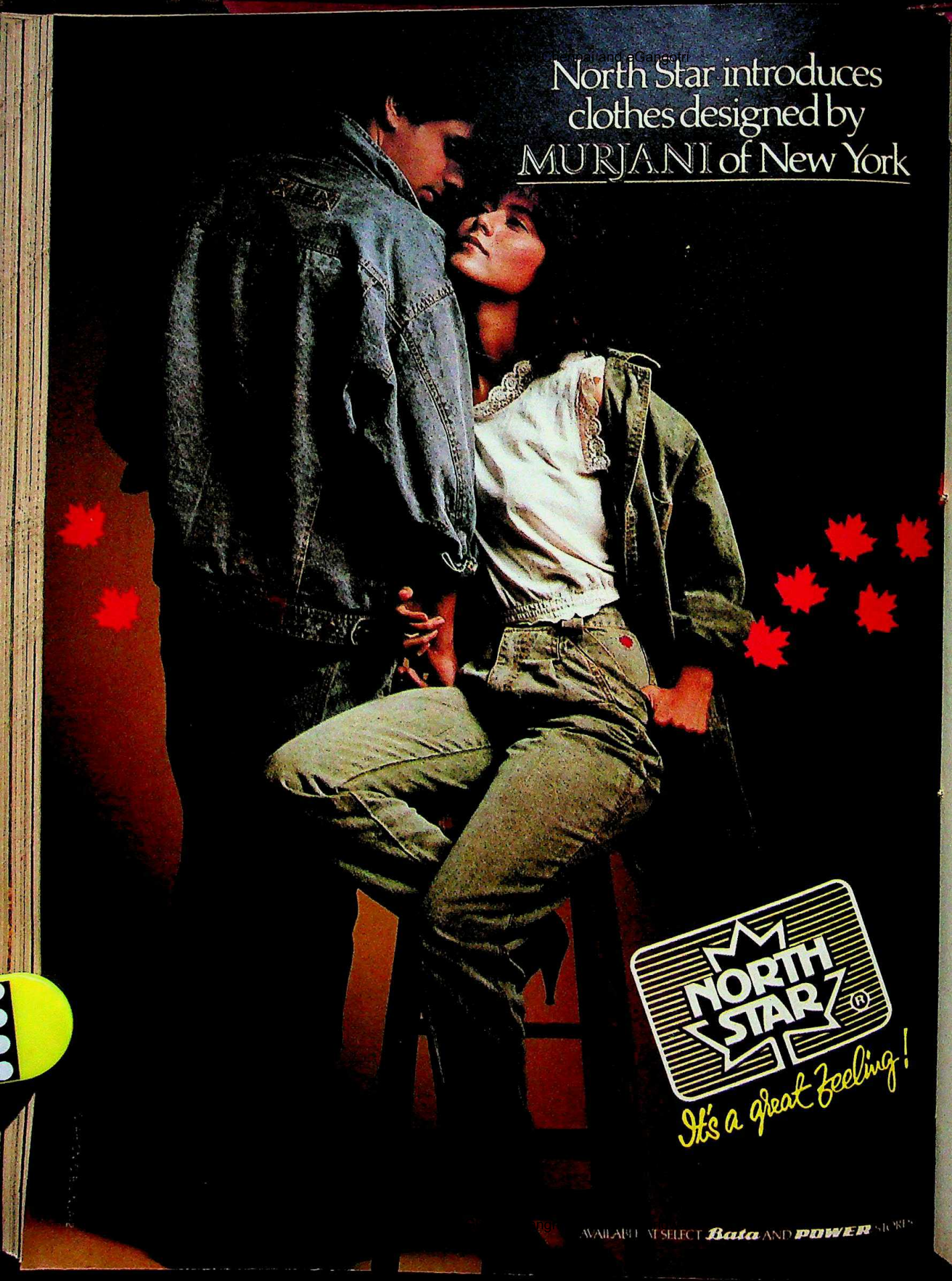
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Workers outside closed unit: burgeoning trend

WEST BENGAL

A Wave of Closures

Ancillary units and workers languish

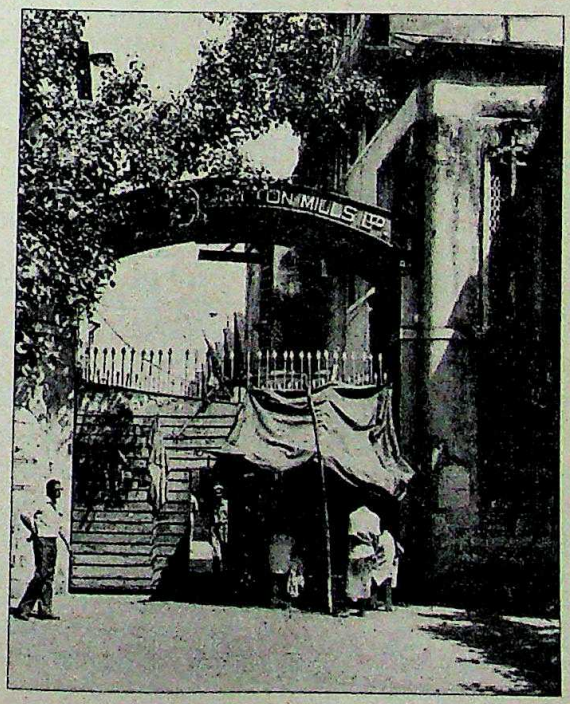
DILIP Kayat runs a small enterprise at Memanpur near Batanagar, 28 km away from Calcutta. Kayat's unit used to earn about Rs 15,000 a month by processing rubber scrap into fine granules, a raw material for footwear soles. But it has been closed for three months, his 10 workers have taken up manual work and Kayat is shooting off job applications. He explains simply: "My wife has cancer and there is no money. One has to survive."

Not very far away, Samir Bose, proprietor of Santosh Rubber Works, also is in a financial bind. He used to sell his products to a Dunlop unit, which owes him money and is now closed.

Bose and Kayat are victims of a new wave of company closures sweeping West Bengal. Over the last several months, many big daddies of industry have downed shutters, several of their ancillary units have followed suit, and an estimated 1.5 lakh workers have swelled the ranks of the state's 46 lakh job seekers. Says Subrata Mukherjee, state Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) president: "Unfortunately, our manufacturing premises have turned into graveyards."

The casualty list is not confined to sunset industries like jute. Blue-chip concerns like Guest Keen Williams (GKW), Metal Box, Bata, a Dunlop unit and a Western India Match Company unit are shut. And the Durgapur and Haldia units of the public sector Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation Ltd have been shut for over two years.

Kesoram Cotton Mills: tough demands



In the last 20 months, 11 private industrial giants have closed, including the Birla-owned Kesoram Cotton. If relatively smaller companies are included, the numbers burgeon. As many as 122 companies—which once reported sales of over Rs 1 crore each—are shut.

The latest—and the most alarming—wave of shut-downs is the result of a face-off between West Bengal's corporate managements and labour unions. In an unusual turn of events, managements have become tough. They are demanding retrenchment of surplus labour, increases in productivity and a wage freeze.

The determination to shed flab follows the Jyoti Basu Government's efforts at rejuvenating the flagging industrial units. But the crackdown by managements has evoked a sharp labour response. Result: lock-outs.

"There is no alternative," argues Surendra Kumar Birla, president of Kesoram Industries. "We have to make our units viable, if not profitable. Industrial units are not charities," says Birla (not to be confused with S.K. Birla of Chloride India).

The Rs 35-crore Kesoram Cotton, a division of Kesoram Industries, was losing Rs 40 lakh a month, till it closed in February 1987. Although the state Government rejected the company's application to close, Birla says he will not reopen unless workers

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accept new productivity standards. Asks he: "If one textile worker in Bombay can operate 10 to 12 sides of a ring frame section, why are our workers not willing to operate more than three sides?"

Low productivity is a common grouse. "The output at our Batanagar factory is the lowest among all our units," complains K.V.S. Shanbhogue, Bata's general manager for legal and corporate affairs.

Last July, the Bata management declared a lock-out after accusing workers of indiscipline and of adopting go-slow tactics. Both Chief Minister Basu and Labour Minister Shanti Ghatak declared the lock-out illegal, the management presented 35 preconditions (including official acceptance that 500 workers were surplus) to reopen the factory, and Basu wrote to Bata President Thomas G. Bata in Canada seeking his intervention. Workers picketed Bata shops in Calcutta till the management obtained a court order providing for special officers to run the shops. Amidst these moves, about 150 Bata ancillary units languished for want of orders.

The Kesoram and Bata situations are repeated in companies such as Dunlop, Metal Box and GKW, with differences in detail (in Dunlop, the workers struck work, refused to settle for a reasonable wage hike and an exasperated labour minister washed his hands off the affair).

Labour, of course, views these developments with alarm. "The lock-outs are illegal. The Government must start proceedings against errant managements," says Lal Bahadur Singh, state INTUC general secretary. But government officials say they can do little. "Our role is limited," says Labour Secretary D.K. Ghosh. "We're just arbitrators."

Ghosh also counters the charge of low productivity. "Productivity here is not less than that in other states. Otherwise how would TV manufacturers here compete with those spread all over the country?" He points out that the Government has no power to impose industry-wise wage agreements. "Therefore, many employers are paying less than the prescribed minimum wages after signing bipartite agreements."

Whatever the truth of all this, it is clear that a state which had once hoped to reassert its industrial primacy will remain in the dumps. Concedes Industries Secretary P.K. Sarkar: "The closure of so many units may be reflected in the state's index of industrial production. But to what extent it will go down is difficult to say." —KAMALJEET RATTAN

AIR-INDIA

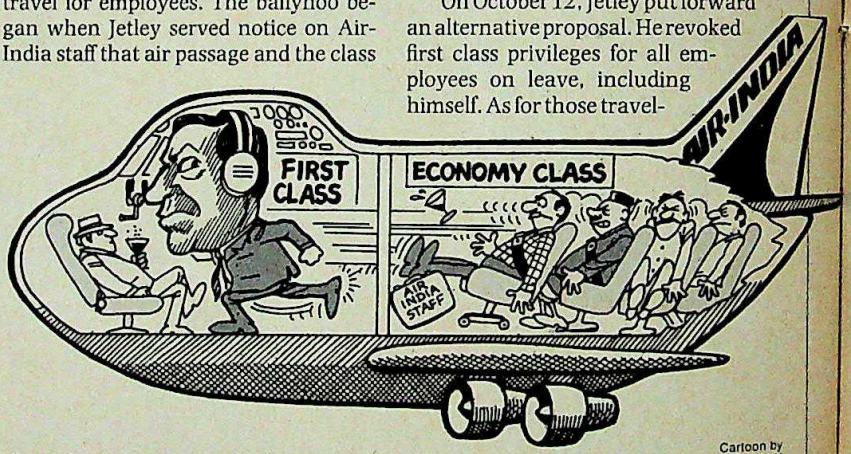
First Class Row

Employees' privileges curtailed

AIR-India has flown through some turbulent weather. First class seat occupancy has dipped and the airline tumbled into red ink by Rs 43.41 crore last year. But Managing Director Rajan Jetley is a fighter. The airline plans to launch an advertisement blitz on British TV and woo businessmen with in-flight film festivals and gourmet cuisine.

Snag: Jetley's plans seem to have gone into a tailspin. Air-India is saddled with a labour dispute that's upset schedules, led to 36 flights being cancelled in three weeks, stranded passengers around the world and cost it Rs 4 crore.

The issue of contention: first class travel for employees. The ballyhoo began when Jetley served notice on Air-India staff that air passage and the class of travel was "a privilege", not "a right". More important, it limited first class travel to deputy directors and above, commanders of 747s and pilots and engineers on duty. Others would fly cub class or economy. And vacation travel privileges for employees and dependants were distributed according to rank.



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Jetley's notice followed one dismaying revelation: just two of the 16 first class seats were paid for; staff or their dependants occupied the remainder—as any employee who earned Rs 2,480 a month and above, some 1,300 of them, was entitled to fly first class.

Jetley's brave policy is not new—previous managements tried to introduce it, only to beat a hasty retreat when faced with irate staff unions. This time too, they cried foul: the notice could harbinger arbitrary moves curbing pension and other benefits. Said J.N. Mohanty, joint secretary of the Aircraft Maintenance Engineers' Association: "Jetley is governing the company by administrative orders, not negotiated settlements. Today it's first class travel, tomorrow it could be wages." Former association president G. Chandrashekhar fumed: "The issue is not first class travel, but the management sidestepping basic labour-management practices. Jetley has wrong priorities and the right connections." Jetley denied this.

According to the management, the unions launched a work-to-rule stir. While the unions have denied this, engineers have undeniably gone by the book and inspected each aircraft and window panel minutely, so delaying about two flights a day. For instance, two aircraft (VT-EGB and VT-ENQ) sent for a check-up were inordinately delayed in the hangar. But association officials insist the delays are a result of the airline overstretching its resources.

On October 12, Jetley put forward an alternative proposal. He revoked first class privileges for all employees on leave, including himself. As for those travelling on duty, only the nine functional directors and pilots and engineers would be entitled to first class.

Jetley's move has been commended by many industrialists. A textile tycoon said: "When I'm paying good money (Air-India's first class round trip Bombay-New York fare is Rs 59,984), I don't expect to sit next to Air-India personnel." Another industrialist wrote to Jetley: "What annoyed me was that due to comradeship, Air-India staff was offered more personalised services than full-fare paying passengers like me."

Union officials point out that top airline officials can fly first class through inter-line transfers with other airlines, a facility engineers cannot avail of (Air-India says this is not that easy). Last fortnight, the claims and counter-claims continued, grounding a troubled airline's revival plans. —SALIL TRIPATHI

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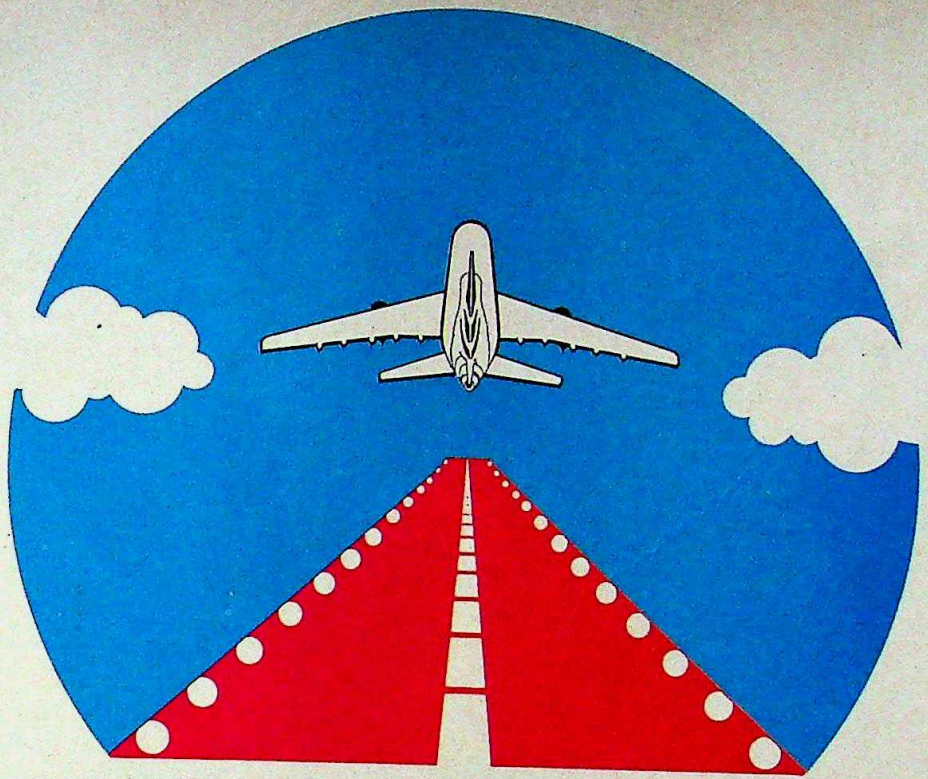

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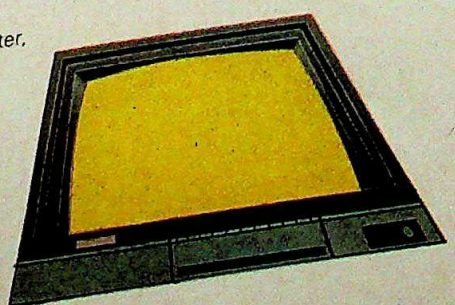

On our way

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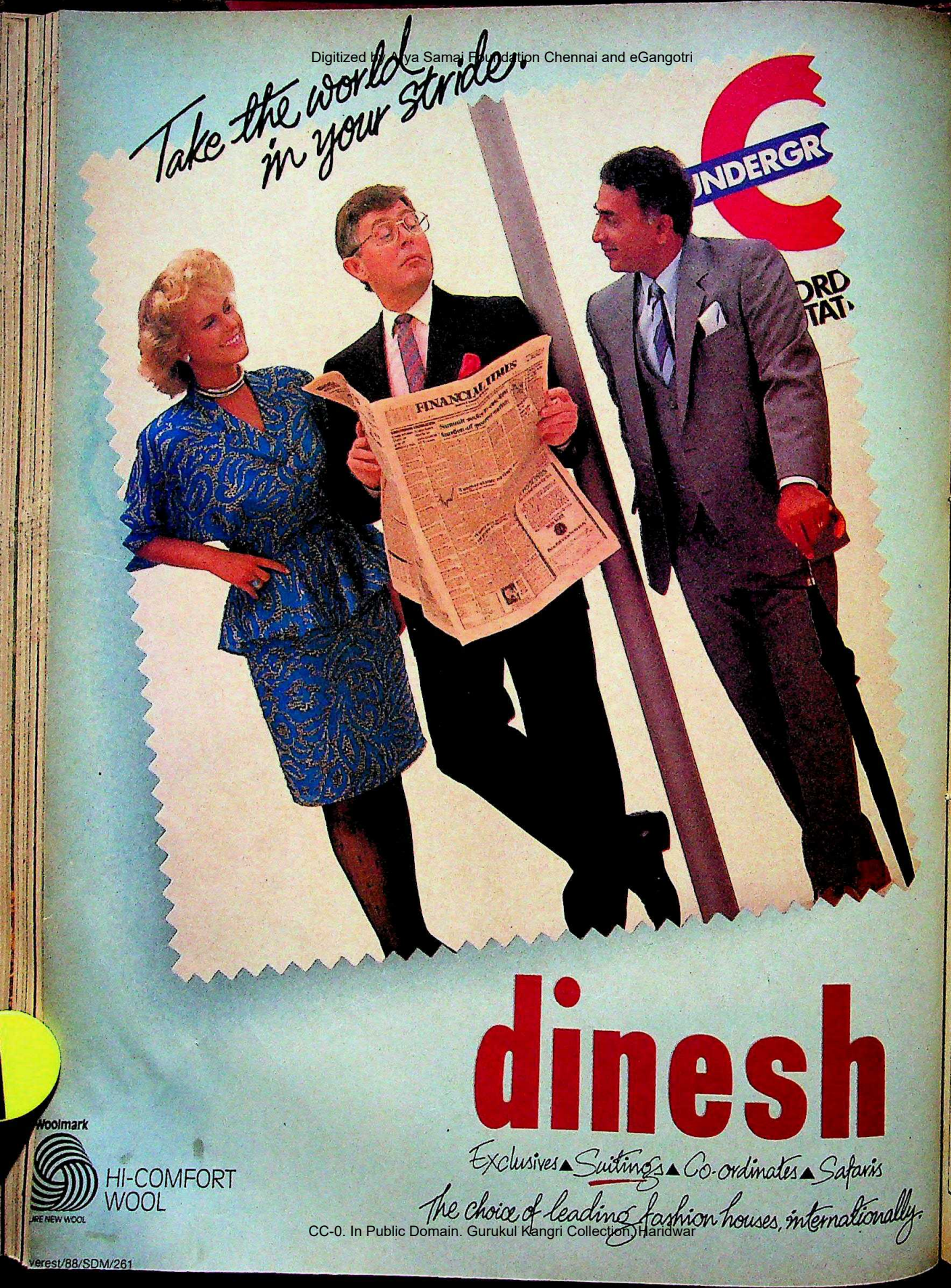

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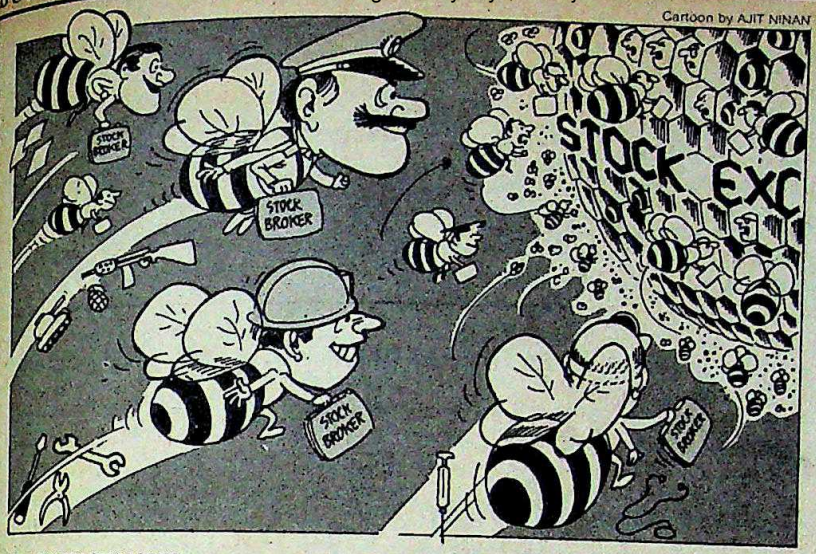

STOCK EXCHANGES

Broking New Ground

An uncommon breed enters the world of stockbrokers

WHAT do ayurvedic doctor N.M. Shah, Lt-Colonel Ajit Mayor, mechanical engineer Lalit Khanna, and company secretary Pramod Kumar Jain have in common? The answer, surprisingly, is that they're all stockbrokers.

And they're part of an uncommon band of individuals who're storming the citadels of broking—a once-incestuous club whose membership was and to a large extent still remains hereditary—and imperceptibly changing the style of a traditional profession. They still form a minority on the country's stock exchanges, but their tribe is steadily burgeoning.

Over the last couple of years, company executives, bank officers, engineers and chartered accountants have leaped into the stock-market, playing the game cannily to rake in cash. "A number of people have entered the market," confirms M.R. Mayya, executive director of the Bombay Stock Exchange. "Quite a few chartered accountants and engineers made a fortune in the boom of 1985 and 1986." Indeed, one of the new brokers who did not wish to be identified confesses to having made Rs 15 lakh between 1976 and 1985 and, astonishingly, another Rs 15 lakh in 1985 alone.

After making their pile, many of them have gone into the share broking business. Starting off usually as a sub-broker, who brings clients to brokers and earns a commission on the business, a few of them have now graduated into brokers and become full-fledged members of the stock exchange. This has been made possible by the Government, which is keen on infusing new blood into the stock-markets.

More investors are putting money into shares and debentures, but there simply aren't enough brokers to service the new clientele. More to the point, brokers can operate on the stock exchanges only if they have a seat or membership. Membership of the Bombay Stock Exchange, for instance, was frozen at 504 for over two decades. But prodded by the Finance Ministry, the stock exchanges have been throwing open membership to professionals and others. The Bombay Stock Exchange is raising its membership by 50 and has already distributed 13 seats. The bill for a seat: Rs 6 lakh.

While the new opportunities have attracted many to the exchanges—the executive director of a company that often hits the headlines, and the legal adviser of a pharmaceutical company are reportedly among those who've applied for membership of the Delhi exchange—the very complexion of the market is changing, and the broker has gained some respectability. Says Arun Sheth, a partner in the Bombay-based Prabhudas Lilladher: "When I joined in 1970, I was asked by several brokers whether I had not found any other profession. The broker's image was not very good. He was not regarded as an adviser, just as a person who buys and sells shares." Adds Mayya: "In the '60s and mid-'70s, the sons of stockbrokers left the profession. Now their sons have come back to the stock-market."

One who did return to a family share broking business is Rahul Mallik. After a four-and-a-half-year stint at Merril Lynch in the US as a financial analyst, he restarted his family concern two years ago. "Our family had been in the business for long, but my father died and we had a small unused cabin in the stock exchange," explains Mallik.

Another is Lalit Khanna. A mechanical engineer, Khanna started his working life at HMM Ltd, the food company. Three years later he switched to the marketing division of Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) and put in five years at the public sector power equipment giant. "At 21, you are not very mature and want to do what everyone else is doing. So when I saw all my friends working for companies, I decided to take up a job. It was only later that I realised I could rise only to a particular level in BHEL." So Khanna joined his family business in Delhi. Future plans for his firm include a foray into management consultancy, and offices in Montreal, New York and Muscat to garner non-resident Indian business.

Job dissatisfaction also prompted Subash Karkhanis to resign from his branch manager's post at the Bank of Maharashtra in Bombay. In the teeth of family opposition, Karkhanis floated an investment firm which, he reports, has an "average collection of Rs 2 lakh a day." In 1985, he turned to the stock-market and became a sub-broker, bringing clients to bigger brokers and getting a percentage of the business as commission. "I faced a lot of difficulties," admits Karkhanis. "Very few brokers entertain new people in this line." But persistence paid off, and he's now applied for a seat on the Bombay exchange. Does he have regrets at chucking up a good job? "Absolutely not. I earn at least four times my earlier salary. Plus I get job satisfaction."

Four years ago, engineer Pran Murgai too resigned from a job to start a stockbroking firm. After a six-year spell in the US, he worked at IEL for 12 years but quit, he says, because of office politics and because he wanted to join his parents in Delhi. "I had dabbled in shares

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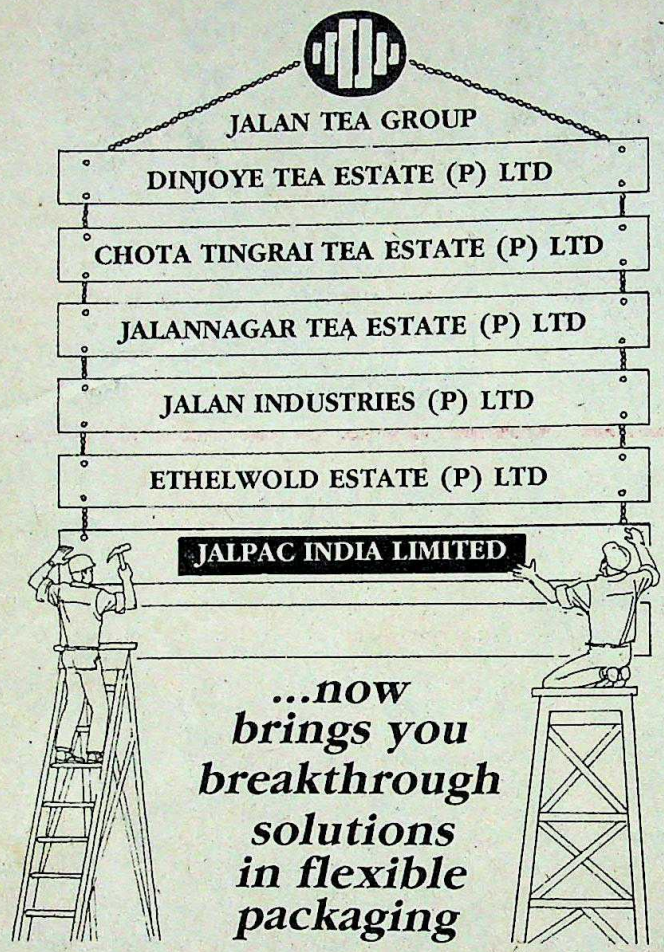
A pioneering tradition in tea...



A tradition that dates back to 1890, when Jalans started their operations with the business of trading in tea and other commodities. The year 1925 saw Jalans acquiring the first tea company in Assam. The next seed of enterprise was sown just before the Second World War with the planting of Dinjoye Tea Estate. This pioneering effort continued with the Jalan Tea Group acquiring new tea estates and developing existing ones.

Today Jalan Tea Group has six factories in Dibrugarh with an annual tea production of 45 lac kgs. The product-mix covers the entire range of tea manufacturing – Orthodox and CTC bulk teas, exclusive Tea Bags and packet teas in wooden and tin caddies, and finds wide customer acceptance, both in India and abroad.

The strength, commitment and expertise of Jalan Tea Group's operations are evidenced by the following financial parameters:

	1977	1987	% increase
	(Rs. in lacs)		
Capital and Reserves	296	742	150%
Revenues	506	1170	131%
Net Fixed Assets and Investments	144	751	422%
Profits (before Tax)	183	239	31%

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P.K. JAIN
Company Secretary

N.M. SHAH
Doctor

PRAN MURGAI
Engineer

AJIT MAYOR
Lt-Colonel

SUBASH KARKHANIS
Bank Manager

Many have given up steady professional careers to storm the citadel of broking.

with about Rs 20,000 and made a lot of money, especially with the Reliance bonanza. So I had some working knowledge of the stock-markets," says Murgai. Friends in the exchange helped him buy a seat for Rs 2.5 lakh (it costs vastly more now), but it took him six months to comprehend the nitty-gritty of the share bazaar.

The most unusual examples of the new breed, however, are Lt-Colonel Ajit Mayor and N.M. Shah. For Mayor, it all began as a hobby in the late '60s. He was posted at Gulmarg, and began reading books on the stock-market sent by his sister in the US. Subsequently, he started dabbling in the market, buying shares and hawking them when prices shot up. With hobby turning into a passion, he bought a Delhi Stock Exchange seat for Rs 2.5 lakh in his wife's name. "In 1986, I bid farewell to the army after 24 years of service to enter the more adventurous world of the broker," says he.

Shah made a comfortable living from practising medicine for 26 years. But his heart wasn't in it. When friends invited him to join a stockbroking firm, he leaped at the opportunity and joined them in February 1985. "For eight or 10 months, I used to sit at my clinic once a day, but closed down my private practice in January 1986." Shah says that he has no regrets, that he'd never return to medicine, and that he makes much more money now than he did before.

While Shah insists that money was not the big draw, money was the main attraction in several other cases. "People want to make money quickly after having seen investors making money," says M.R. Mondkar, vice-president at JM Financial & Investment Consultancy Services and a close market-watcher.

Consider the case of the Delhi-based I.K. Singhal. After qualifying as a chartered accountant in 1977, he practised for three years. But business did not exactly flourish. Urged by relatives and friends to try his hand at the market, Singhal rustled up Rs 50,000. Early flutters in shares were rewarding, and there was no looking back after that. Singhal bought a ticket on the Delhi Stock Exchange, and now employs some six brokers and underwrites share issues. The going has been good enough for him to invest about Rs 3 crore in a ceramics project and another Rs 2.5 crore in a hydrogen peroxide venture.

FOR others, the prime motive was the urge to set up a business. Pramod Kumar Jain qualified as an engineer, obtained a degree in business management from the Indian Institute of Management at Calcutta, and finally qualified as a company secretary. He put in several years with the Mafatlals and with an electronics firm in Bombay, all the while playing the stock-markets.

Jain finally chucked up his company secretary's post. After an apprenticeship in the stock-market, he became a member of the Bombay Stock Exchange last April, nearly two years after he put in his application, and invested Rs 20 lakh in setting up his firm. "I had a job all these years," says Jain, " and felt that it was better to have one's own business. I was able to analyse balance sheets and extrapolate results and thought I could provide professional services to investors who are badly treated by brokers."

There is no dearth of such examples. But for every success story, there are hundreds who eke out an existence on the outskirts of the market, simply because they cannot cough up the money to buy a seat. And brokers caution that to set up shop, at least Rs 15 lakh is required, including membership fees and the cost of office space.

Still, there's no doubt that most of the new breed operate differently, are perhaps more professional, and have more small investors as clients. Says Singhal: "There is a difference in the way we work and the way the traditional stockbroker works. Most of the traditional brokers are one-man shows or family concerns. We delegate authority to the professionals who work in the firm." Chips in Mayor: "I have an advantage over the conventional broker. I can go and talk to bureaucrats and managing directors of companies with confidence and on the same footing."

Some of them (Murgai is but one example) already have or plan to computerise their accounts, draw on computer data banks for information. "Investors now ask more questions," explains Dhiren Sheth, a computer buff who quit a job with the Tatas and joined his brother Dhiren nine years ago. "So brokers have to find the answers. Those who do this provide better service."

Inevitably, this has not always gone down well with more conventional brokers. Says Arun Sheth: "The entry of new people has made others fear they may take away their business." Nevertheless, this is the wave of the future—and the heady promise of a market that has for too long been dominated by brokers who dish out indifferent service.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
and SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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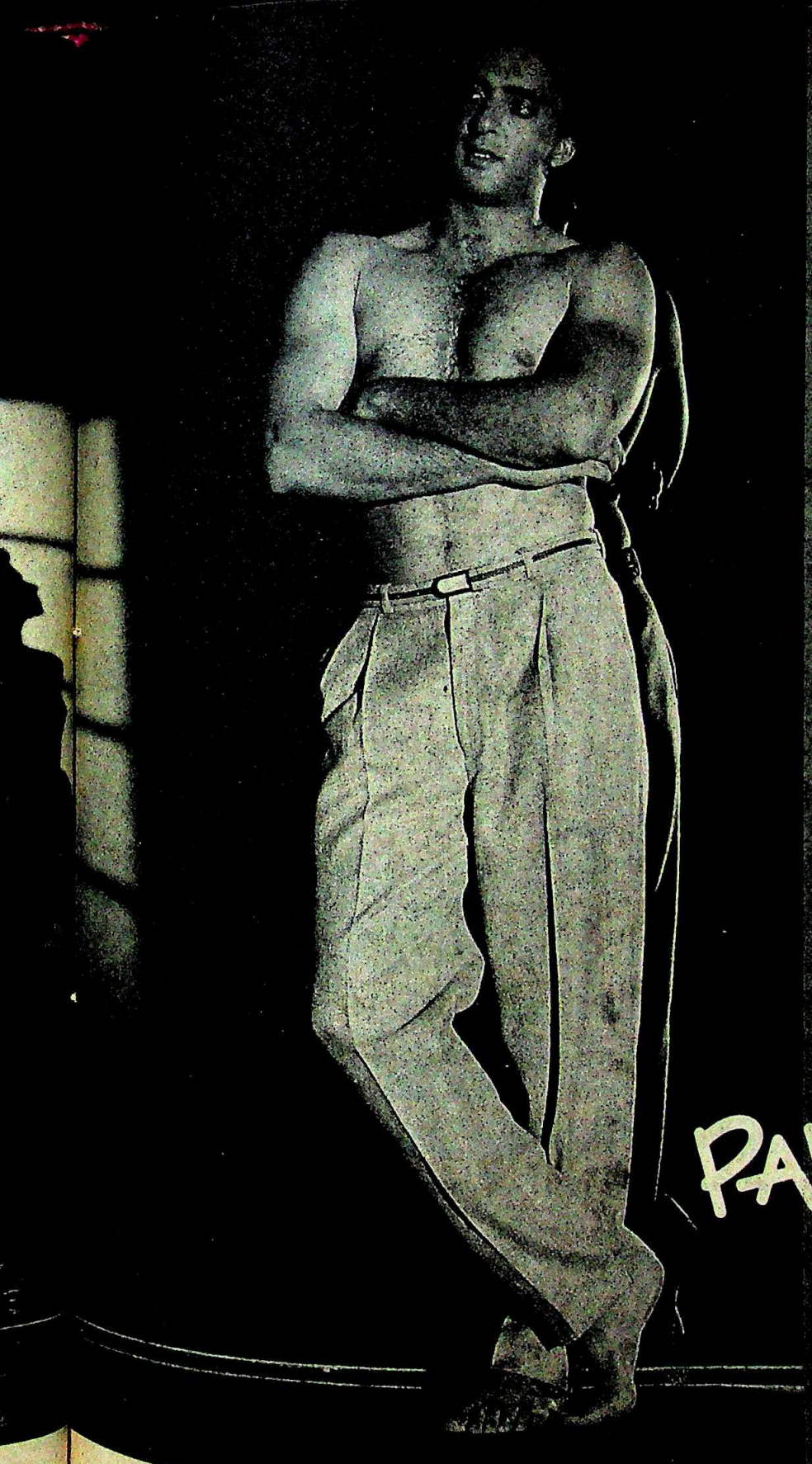

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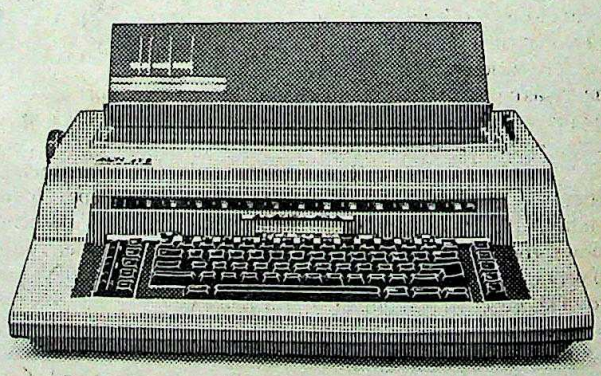

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Let down by a Pig

THE country's oil and gas carrying pipeline capacity has dropped—and all because of a pig.

No, it's not the four-legged animal. This pig is an unusual piece of equipment that's sent through a pipeline to scrape its insides free of wax, sand, sludge and other deposits. The pipeline in question is the Oil and Natural Gas Commission's (ONGC) Bombay High-Uran line, commissioned in 1978.

When it was first "pigged" years ago, one of the pigs took an inordinately long time coming out—eight months, instead of a few weeks. And it emerged damaged. Fearing operational failure, ONGC technicians stopped pigging altogether. As a result, the pipeline's capacity of 18.17 million tonnes a year fell by 25 per cent, according to a confidential document. ONGC tried other techniques to step up the flow of oil through the pipeline, including heating crude at process platforms to reduce the wax content. But it failed to find a long-term solution. Since the pipeline has not been pigged for over eight years, "the risk of rupture remains", says the document.

"It is easy to say from hindsight that pigging should not have been stopped," argues a high industry official. "But the Government's priorities were different at that time. Since world crude prices had shot up, there was considerable pressure on ONGC to increase production. Pigging would have meant curtailing output." And the importance of Bombay High, which produces over 65 per cent of the country's total oil, is self-evident.

ONGC now proposes to construct a stand-by pipeline, as part of an over Rs 900- crore offshore development project. Official concurrence was expected in March but is still awaited.

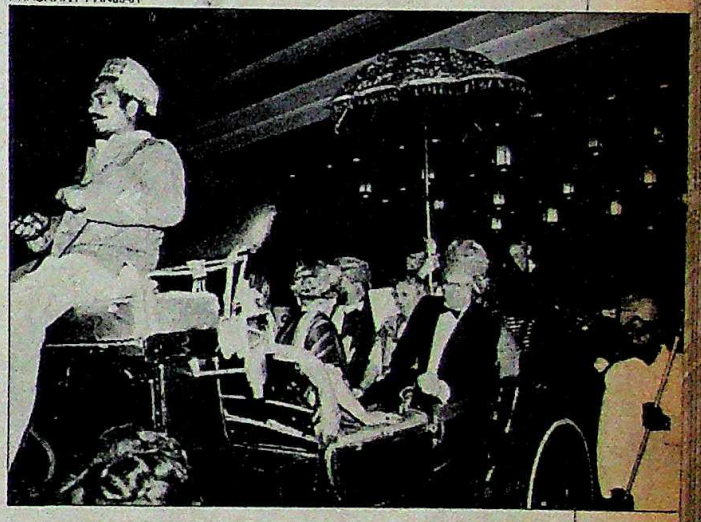
Pulled in Different Ways

THE Government sometimes speaks in multiple voices. Consider the Thapar proposal to put up a Rs 112-crore, 30 megawatt solar power plant in Punjab in partnership with the Punjab Agro Industries Corporation and Luz Industries of the US. The Department of Non-Conventional Energy Sources (DNES) is all for it, but the Planning Commission has reservations. The venture plans to deploy the sun's rays on "heat transfer" fluid which passes through "exchangers" to generate steam which then drives conventional turbines. At night, the turbines can be run using coal or biomass as fuel. The problem: the project's Rs 50-crore foreign exchange outgo. With the commission questioning this and the department pushing for it, the project seems to be caught in a bind.

Rumblings at the Jamboree

IT was a bash to remember. For five days last month, the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) played host in the capital to over 400 delegates of an apex global body, the International Hotel Association. One evening, the foreign delegates even witnessed a scene from India's feudal past—a procession of camels and buggies winding around the Taj Palace hotel, where the annual jamboree was held.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Ajit Kerkar; and a procession of buggies at the hotel: Taj show

And now that it's all over, the story can be told. Underlying the bonhomie were a few rumblings. The president of FHRAI is Ajit B. Kerkar, managing director of the Tata's Taj group. And it was a Taj show almost all the way.

That was the problem. Four hotel chains—the Oberoi, ITC's Welcomgroup, Hyatt and the public sector India Tourism Development Corporation—expressed displeasure about the Taj group hogging most of the limelight. Even before the bash began, the four shot off an irate letter to FHRAI's Executive President Ram Pershad protesting that "the federation is being used to promote one hotel chain in total disregard to the other members of the federation". Another complaint: while the federation was paying for the do at the Taj, other hotel chains were footing the bill for the functions they held.

Pershad and a Taj spokesman, however, explain that over a year ago, Pershad had asked all the hotels to provide rooms to delegates and a venue for the conference. The collective murmur was that October was the peak season and hotels would lose money if they offered rooms at a 25 per cent discount, as per custom. Few rooms were offered. At one point Pershad even thought of backing out of the conference, till Kerkar promised him 200 rooms at the Taj. Later, after the hotels protested, they were told that they could host any dinner they wished to. Two of them did—and all are the best of friends now. Till the next conference perhaps?

Better Late than Never

HUNDREDS of excise cases are awaiting adjudication. Some of them have been pending for years. The good news is that the Government is now finally trying to do something about this.

For one, it has asked its lawyers to seek early hearings of cases. More important, the Central Board for Excise and Customs has been asked to examine the feasibility of appointing a commissioner for the settlement of excise and customs cases, on the lines of the income tax settlement commissioner. Whether all this will work is, of course, an entirely different question but the official intentions are clearly laudable.

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THE MARKETS

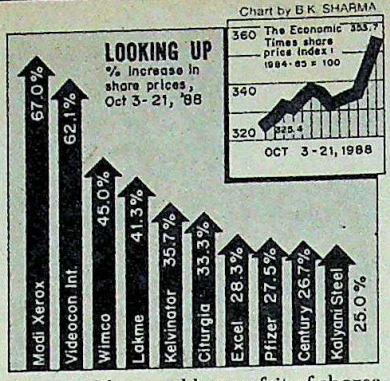
Sharp Upswing

Prices climb after dipping

WITH its sudden ups and downs, the stock-market at times looks enigmatic to the lay man. But as most punters know all too well, it has a sense of order of its own.

The market has been overheated for some weeks now, with too many share brokers buying shares without taking delivery of them. Not unexpectedly, in what is widely seen as a corrective step, prices dipped before rapidly moving up once more last fortnight.

Triggering off the initial slump was the Government's decision that the stock exchanges would have to rank newly listed shares on a par with shares that are already quoted, for trading and delivery purposes. Meant to correct the market practice of quoting newly listed securities at a discount, the move also sought to cover shares that come into existence as a result of bonus and convertible debenture issues. One result of



this could be a sudden surfeit of shares in a market where good scrips have been scarce.

That will be welcomed by investors, no doubt. But the effect on the market was, predictably, a drop in share indices. *The Economic Times* index of share prices fell by 5.5 points in two days, from 337.8 on October 10 to 332.3 on October 12. In line with the trend, the shares of companies such as Reliance and Telco, which have newly issued scrips, tumbled. The position remained unchanged for quite a few days: the Calcutta Stock Exchange was closed for the puja holidays, while there was no trading on the Bombay exchange.

Nevertheless, the fundamental strength of the market soon reasserted itself and share prices rapidly gained. Modi Xerox rose by 67 per cent, Videocon International by 62 per cent and Wimco by 45 per cent. Other scrips too moved up: Associated Cement Companies, Century Spinning, Kinetic Engineering and SKF Bearings. In fact, SKF soared by an incredible Rs 250. Expectedly, *The Economic Times* index followed suit, to set a new record of 357.7 for the year.

The sharp upswing can be attributed to technical, market-related factors to some extent. But there is no disputing the fact that part of it is very real. There is also no gainsaying the fact that the financial institutions have been continuously buying shares from the market, and a good deal of the buoyancy is related to this.

So the outlook for the near future is upbeat. The stock-market's big day—*Muharat* trading for the new Samvat Year—lies ahead. Come Diwali and *Muharat*, share prices could be in for yet another round of sharp increases. The next few weeks could therefore prove to be quite crucial.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 21.10.88	Change in Fortnight	
Ashok Leyland	63.00	30.25	62.75	5.25	+
Associated Cement	309.00	128.50	308.00	44.50	+
Atlas Copco	66.00	33.50	63.00	1.00	+
Asian Paints	232.50	128.75	227.50	32.50	+
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	400.00	58.75	+
Baroda Rayon	345.00	140.00	332.50	2.50	+
Bata India	82.50	50.50	81.00	7.50	+
Bharat Forge	200.00	101.00	192.50	31.25	+
Birla Jute	50.25	32.25	50.00	1.00	+
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	53.75	8.75	+
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	142.00	9.00	+
Britania Ind.	121.00	75.00	117.50	1.50	+
Brooke Bond	120.50	75.00	118.00	0.50	–
Ceat Tyres	140.00	55.00	115.00	10.00	+
Century Spinning	1400.00	617.50	1375.00	145.00	+*
Chloride India	80.50	59.00	75.00	1.00	–
Colgate	332.50	160.00	325.00	33.75	+
Cyanamid	72.50	33.00	67.50	7.50	+
DCM	55.00	28.00	45.00	4.00	–
Dunlop	86.50	66.00	81.50	0.50	+
E.I. Hotels	62.50	38.00	55.00	2.50	+
Escorts	71.50	37.00	64.00	3.00	–
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	403.75	71.25	+
Food Specialities	178.75	93.50	169.50	1.00	+
Garware Nylon	56.00	20.00	52.00	1.00	+-
G.E. Shipping	42.50	20.80	40.50	4.75	+
Gujarat St Fertilisers	172.00	75.00	143.75	24.25	–*
Grasim Ind.	122.00	76.00	79.00	35.00	–**
Hind. Aluminium	139.00	73.00	124.00	11.00	+
Hind. Ciba	691.00	332.50	670.00	20.00	+
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	120.00	3.75	+
Hindustan Lever	91.00	59.50	88.00	2.50	+
Hindustan Motors	34.00	15.80	32.50	4.60	+
IEL	52.00	31.00	51.00	6.25	+
Indian Organic	47.50	15.00	45.00	1.50	–
Indian Rayon	84.50	46.00	81.00	3.00	+
Indrol	291.25	133.75	280.00	26.25	+
Ingersoll-Rand	370.00	205.00	345.00	5.00	+
ITC	64.00	30.00	54.50	nil	
J.K. Synthetics	90.00	45.50	87.50	4.00	+
Kinetic Engineering	410.00	161.25	340.00	72.50	+
Kirloskar Cummins	88.75	48.00	82.50	1.25	–
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	327.50	32.50	+
Larsen & Toubro	148.50	75.50	136.50	3.50	–
Lipton	77.50	52.00	74.00	nil	***
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	13.50	nil	
Madura Coats	93.50	59.00	93.50	10.00	+
Mahindra & Mahindra	109.00	48.50	107.00	4.00	+
Milk Food	290.00	72.50	277.50	56.25	+
Motor Industries	687.00	447.50	680.00	20.00	+***
Mukand Iron	119.00	72.50	117.00	7.00	+
National Organic	900.00	390.00	870.00	60.00	+
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	13.50	2.25	+
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	39.50	1.00	–
Pelco Electronics	40.00	24.50	35.75	1.25	–
Pfizer	90.00	50.00	88.00	18.00	+
Premier Auto	50.00	23.00	48.50	2.75	+
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	77.00	4.25	–
Raymond	96.00	41.50	63.00	3.00	+
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	186.50	4.50	–
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	76.50	7.00	+
Shriram Fibres	62.50	32.50	51.00	2.00	–
Siemens India	113.00	56.00	110.00	20.00	+
SKF Bearings	2243.00	1058.00	2190.00	250.00	+
SPIC	60.25	23.50	53.00	nil	
Tata Steel	992.50	568.75	987.50	47.50	+
Telco	785.00	340.00	740.00	32.50	–
Vam Organic	142.00	75.00	137.00	23.00	+
Voltas	500.00	225.00	415.00	25.00	–
Wimco	29.00	11.00	29.00	5.50	+

*Ex-right **Ex-bonus ***Ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	12.2085	12.0717
Austria	Schilling	1	1.1810	1.1651
Bahrain	Dinar	1	38.6220	38.5410
Bangladesh	Taka	100	47.2220	47.0960
Canada	Dollar	1	12.3977	12.2647
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.1504	2.1259
Egypt	Pound	1	6.2989	6.2060
France	Franc	1	2.4691	2.4067
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.9048	1.8849
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0860	0.0800
Iran	Rial	100	20.6081	20.5136
Italy	Lira	100	1.0400	1.0000
Japan	Yen	100	11.9190	11.6279
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8000	0.7601
Kuwait	Dinar	1	51.0000	50.9026
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.5744	5.5159
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0500	1.000
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6612	0.6026
Netherlands	Guilder	1	7.3640	7.2353
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8026	0.7528
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.4226	7.4189
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1200	0.1000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4322	0.4000
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.4020	2.3734
Switzerland	Franc	1	9.8321	9.7243
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1390	0.1200
Thailand	Baht	100	57.7622	57.7020
UK	Pound	1	26.1780	26.0383
USA	Dollar	1	14.8810	14.7275
UAE	Dirham	1	4.000	3.9000
USSR	Rouble	1	16.8939	16.6020
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	8.4246	8.2168

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 22.10.88.

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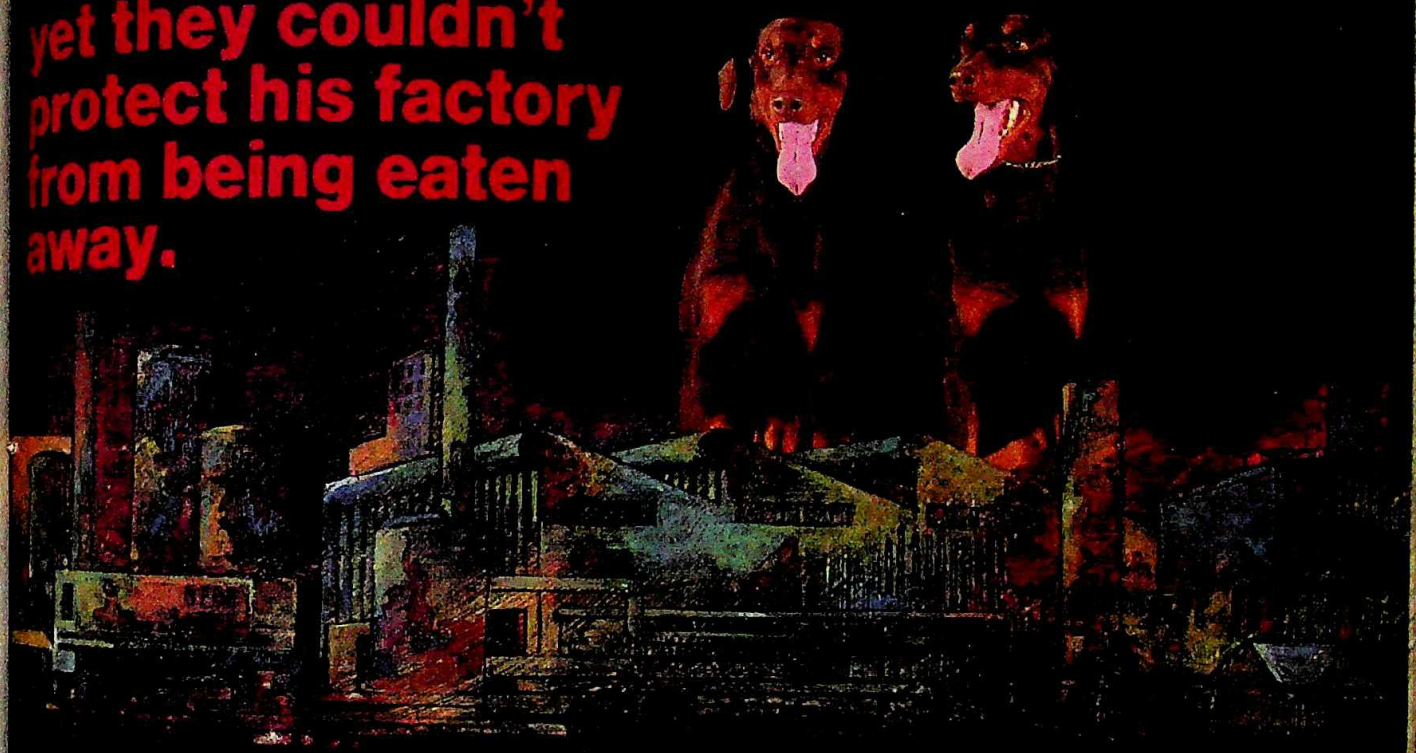
Mr Kapoor had 8 Dobermann pinschers, 10 armed guards and a 22 foot high wall... yet they couldn't protect his factory from being eaten away.



Yes. Mr Kapoor's factory was attacked by rust. Because he neglected one vitally important security measure: lasting protection against corrosion. So what with unending repairs and renovations over the years, his profits kept getting swallowed up.

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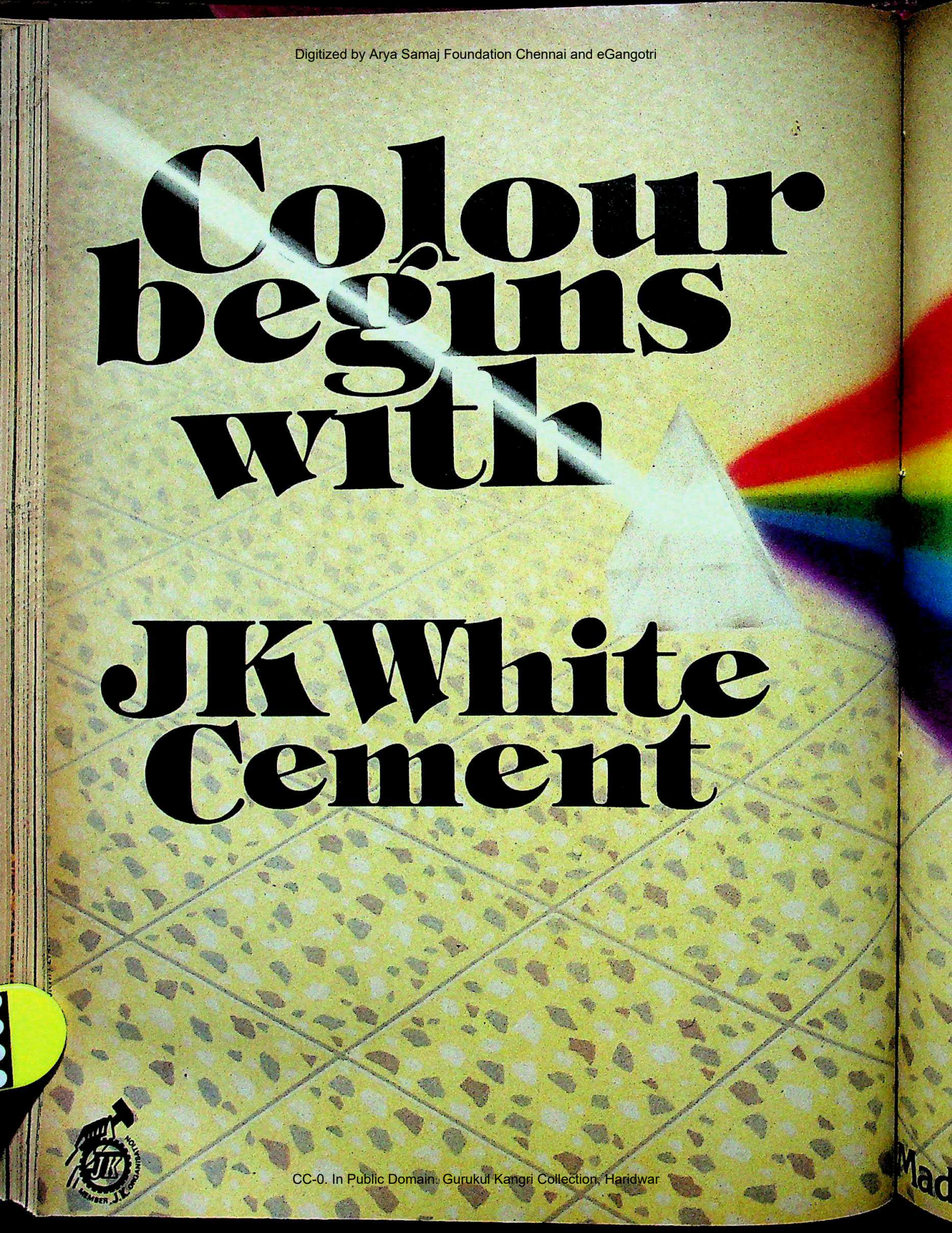

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Prices, for consumers and the wholesale market, are rising faster than they ought to after a good monsoon. This may be partly due to the excess liquidity injected in the system in the last few years. The Government needs to follow price changes carefully.

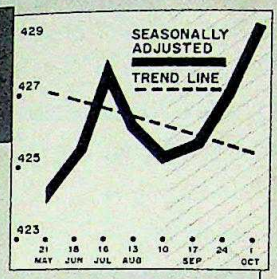
Exports remain reasonably bright with a slight hiccup last month, but imports are rising at a slower rate. The rupee continues to be devalued against the dollar.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
−1.1% p.a.

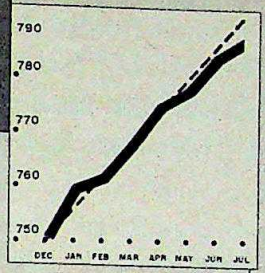


During the last fortnight the index rose by 0.8 per cent. This is disturbing, as the good monsoon should be causing prices to decline now.

Consumer Price Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.1% p.a.

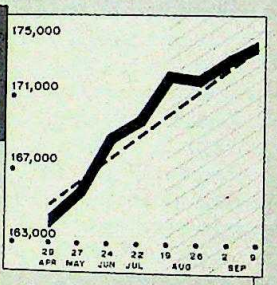


The consumer price index is rising faster than the wholesale price index. Last month the index rose by 0.5 per cent, indicating a slow down.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
14% p.a.

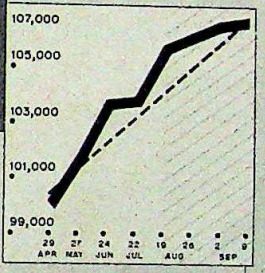


The long-term trend in money supply is rising slowly. Contributing to this was a sharp 1.1 per cent increase during the last fortnight.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.2% p.a.

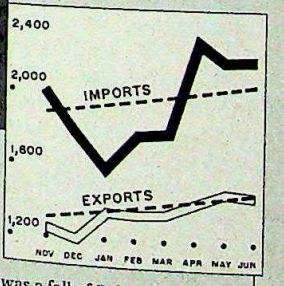


Credit to the commercial sector is easier this year than the corresponding period of '87. Last fortnight there was a rise of 0.65 per cent.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
21.2% p.a.
EXPORTS
15% p.a.
IMPORTS

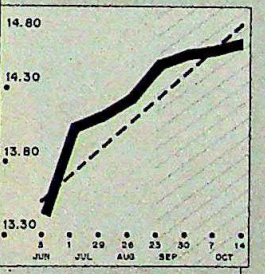


Although there was a fall of 0.6 per cent in our export earnings in the last month, the long-term trend remains buoyant.

Foreign Exchange Rate

Spot Rs/$

Current Trend
23.2% p.a.

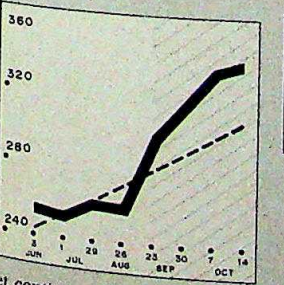


The US dollar continues to become more expensive as the rupee was devalued by 0.64 per cent vis-a-vis the dollar last fornight.

Share Price Index

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
63.2% p.a.

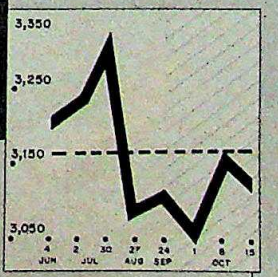


The share market continues to remain bullish even now. There was an increase of 7.1 per cent last fortnight.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
0.6% p.a.



Bullion prices increased by 2.1 per cent last fortnight, finally reversing the recent downward movement.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the 2nd fortnight of September 1988

	% Growth
Gingelly seeds	33.96
Industrial textiles	28.11
Bolts and Nuts	27.25
Lime stone	20.30
Groundnut Seed	15.35
Coconut Oil	17.77
Silk Raw	14.48
Chillies	7.45
Arhar	5.50
Maida	5.35
Cashewnuts	4.85
Zinc	4.34
Betel Nuts	3.77
Gram	3.50
Bajra	3.50
Copper Alloys	3.33
Onion	3.05
Egg	2.80
Trucks	2.70
Wheat	2.59
Gur	2.40
Power Driven Pumps	2.36
Whiskey	2.36
Butter	1.95
Maize	1.90
Khandsari	1.90
Cars	1.67
Cotton Yarn	1.61
Atta	1.53
Tea	1.41
Coffee	1.04
Milk	0.97
Iron Ore	0.97
Sugar	0.70
Hides Raw	0.57
Vanaspati	−0.16
Aluminium	−0.52
Rice	−0.69
Cotton Raw	−0.90
Bananas	−1.20
Transformers	−1.21
Mustard Oil	−2.36
Rape and Mustard Oil	−2.46
Urad	−2.90
Masoor	−3.20

Of the 139 series considered, 37 of them with a total weight of 30.373 had a negative growth and 21 of them with a total weight of 16.467 had a positive growth. Of them, 109 showed no growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Petroleum Crude Thousand Tonnes, September	2587	2474
Petroleum Products Thousand Tonnes, September	3981	3944
Electricity Generated Mill KWH, August	17567	17027
Call Money Rate Per cent, August	8.99	9.97
Plant Load Factor Per cent, August	44.91	51.5

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Nehru's Magic

M.J. Akbar's lively magnum opus, *Nehru: The Making of India*, is to be released on the eve of Jawaharlal Nehru's birth centenary. INDIA TODAY presents exclusive extracts from the book on how Nehru foiled a British plan to Balkanize India, his controversial love life, and his final moments.

GANDHI was the Mahatma, Jawaharlal was the disciple-builder: the heir of the Mahatma, the genius who could be trusted with a priceless and historic legacy.

Gandhi was hardly so naive as to believe that Jawaharlal would ditto everything he said. Far from it. Differences between them on economics and socialism were too open for either to pretend they did not exist. Even in his glorious speech at the 1942 AICC the Mahatma laughed and said Jawaharlal liked to fly, while his concepts of development were more rooted to the village hut and the *charkha*.

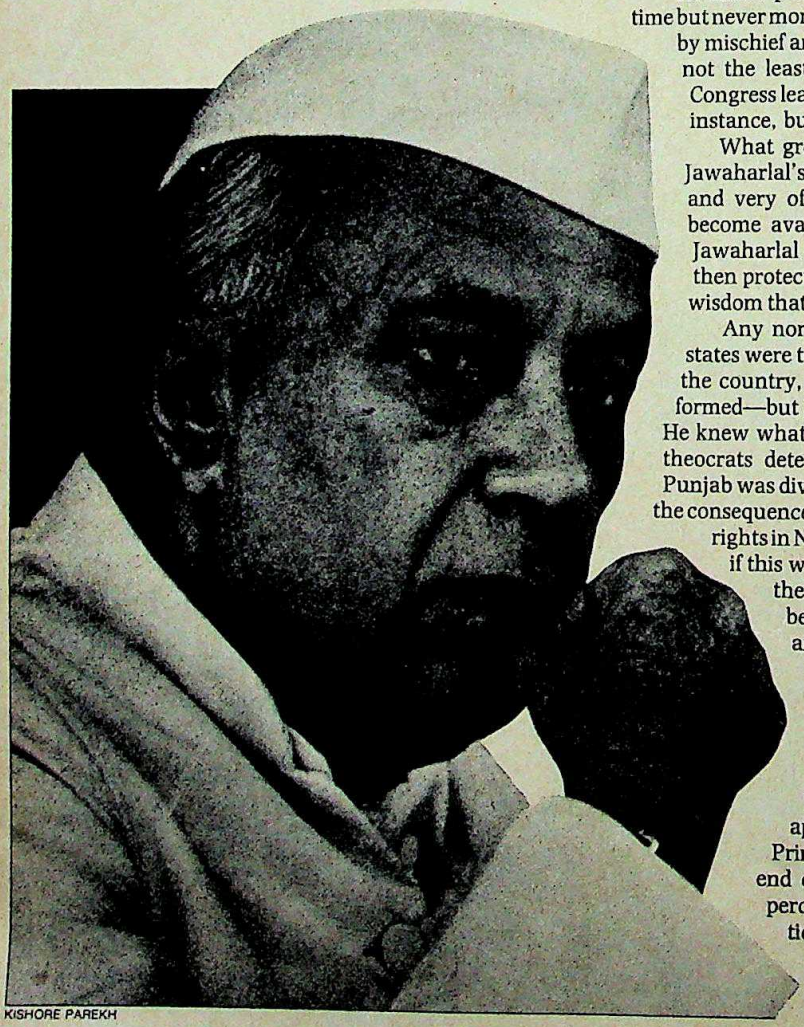
Then why did Gandhi choose an heir who broke off from the master on his own tangents, when others would have been more loyal to detail? Clearly because it was Jawaharlal who could be the best guardian of India, who was closest to Gandhi's understanding of modern Indian nationalism, of the principles which could keep this complex nation united.

He had to put idealism into practice, a difficult task at any time but never more so than as inheritor of a nation torn into two by mischief and mistake. There were dangers everywhere, not the least of them being within. There were many Congress leaders whose lips paid service to secularism, for instance, but whose hands were tainted with blood.

What greater tragedy could there be therefore that Jawaharlal's most vicious critics pin partition on to him—and very often him alone. Enough evidence has now become available to nail this propaganda; if anything Jawaharlal saved India from a worse fate in 1947, and then protected the unity of what was left of India with a wisdom that must place him among the greats of history.

Any norm of behaviour demanded that if linguistic states were to be the pattern for the internal geography of the country, then a "Gurmukhi" Punjab should also be formed—but Jawaharlal refused to allow any such thing. He knew what use could be made of such a geography by theocrats determined to build a secessionist movement. Punjab was divided only after his death; we are now reaping the consequences. Jawaharlal was accused of abusing human rights in Nagaland; once again, he did not care, because if this was to be the price to be paid for Indian unity, then, so be it. In Tamil Nadu language became the bedrock of a secessionist struggle. Jawaharlal's answer: he would declare a war if necessary against those who wanted Dravidistan. And all the while, even as each day became an endless struggle against problems, he never lost the capacity to find time to be a man with a sense of love, fun, intellect, banter. His life is a beautiful rainbow, like the one which appeared in the Delhi sky the day he became Prime Minister of free India. And even though the end of his life saw one of his great mistakes of perception, the trust in China, slide into humiliation and defeat, history will still grant him, on balance, the epitaph which his Bapu had foreseen: the nation was safe in his hands.

—M.J. AKBAR



KISHORE PAREKH

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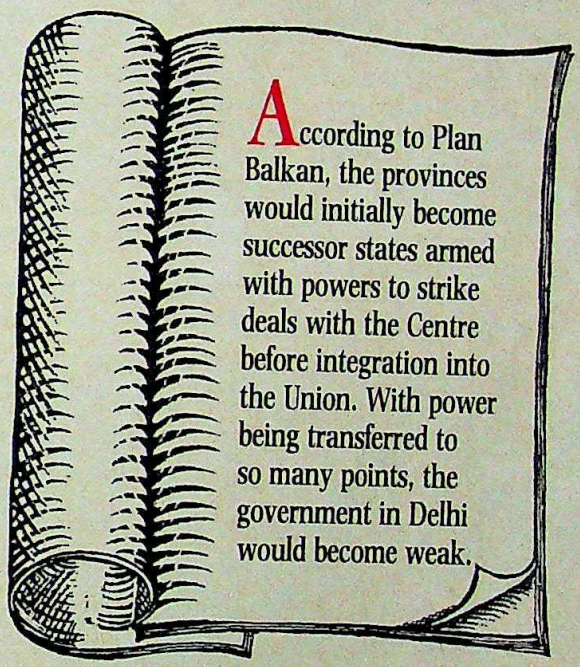
PLAN BALKAN

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the strongman of India, had accepted the idea of partition even before Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the romantic. Rao Bahadur Vapal Pangunni Menon's (1894-1966) memory fails him just a little in his book, *Transfer of Power*, as to whether it was in December 1946 or January 1947 that he convinced his favourite minister, Patel, that a united India was an illusion, that Jinnah would never agree to anything except Pakistan, and that it was better to save what could be saved of India rather than 'gravitate towards civil war'. Menon's view: keep the predominantly non-Muslim parts of Punjab, Bengal and Assam, accept dominion status in the transition phase before a Constituent Assembly could produce the basis for full freedom, deal with the princes without British interference and take over full power as soon as feasible. This, in fact, was what partition was all about, a scheme which Menon calls his plan. After Patel's broad concurrence, Menon forwarded it that winter to Pethick-Lawrence with Wavell's permission. Mountbatten saw this plan before he left London for India. But the British were not going to leave without one last stab at something infinitely worse.

The Mountbattens took a short trip to the hills of Simla as another fierce summer descended in the first week of May. Nehru, along with Indira and Krishna Menon joined them as their personal guests on 8 May and were put up at the Viceregal Lodge. It was an ugly and uncertain time; no one knew quite what was happening, or what would happen. In the chaos of competing ambitions, everyone kept their demands high, their expectations low, and tried to bridge the gap with clamour. Some of the stronger princes thought they could get away with independence in the confusion—and the feudal desire cut across religious lines. The Rajputs of Kashmir or Jodhpur were as keen to keep their estates as the Nawabs of Bhopal or Hyderabad. Voices on the extreme wings of the Akali movement had been raised in favour of an independent state—Khalistan. Trapped between the League's Pakistan and a withering Congress, the Pathans of the Frontier sought independence in preference to merger with Pakistan. Suhrawardy set up a momentum for an independent Bengal, an idea which Jinnah did not mind much because it meant another part of India was lost to Gandhi and Nehru. He told Suhrawardy that he would prefer the Balkanization of India after he got his Pakistan in the north-west; Suhrawardy could keep his Bengal. Jinnah's doctor, J.A.L. Patel, who kept those X-rays in his office safe to protect the dangerous secret, had told him after a seizure in May 1946 that he had only two years left before the lungs gave up. Now only one year remained, and Jinnah wanted his dream before he died. One of the most extraordinary suggestions of that time, however, was made by Brigadier (later General) K.M. Cariappa, who on 9 May called on Lord Ismay and suggested that the British hand over power to the Indian Army in June 1948, with either Nehru or Jinnah as the commander-in-chief (Ismay to Mountbatten, 10 May 1947; Ismay adds: 'It is hard to know whether Cariappa in putting forward this idea was ingenuous and ignorant or ingenuous and dangerous.')

On 2 May, Lord Ismay and Sir George Abell flew to London with what is known as Mountbatten's First Draft Plan for the transfer of power to obtain the final approval of the British Cabinet. Mountbatten wanted this by 10 May, so that he could put in a week's preparation; he had marked out 17 May for separate meetings with the princes and the leaders of the political parties, during which he would reveal his plan. The princes could be pressured to accept. But if the politicians did not agree, and could not offer an alternative, Mountbatten had decided he would simply hand over power on the basis of this plan and quit. By 10 May word came from London that the Cabinet had approved the plan, with some minor modifications.



According to Plan Balkan, the provinces would initially become successor states armed with powers to strike deals with the Centre before integration into the Union. With power being transferred to so many points, the government in Delhi would become weak.

On the evening of 10 May, Mountbatten and Nehru retired to the Viceroy's study after dinner for a convivial chat over a glass of port, quite the normal thing to do in British etiquette. They were alone. Mountbatten says that he decided to show Nehru a copy of this secret plan on a 'hunch'. He was not supposed to, of course. On 11 May in a secret telegram to Lord Ismay he explained: "Last night, having made real friends with Nehru during his stay here, I asked him whether he would look at the London draft, as an act of friendship and on the understanding that he would not utilize his prior knowledge or mention to his colleagues that he had seen it." It was so obviously a sincere gesture from a man of goodwill, who was still perhaps unaware of the extraordinary dimensions of all the decisions waiting to be taken. His staff was strongly opposed to showing the plan to Nehru; they argued that it would be a 'breach of faith' to reveal it to Nehru in advance without showing it to Jinnah too. But perhaps they understood how Nehru would react.

According to this plan, the provinces would initially become successor states, and inevitably this would influence the negotiating powers of particularly the larger princely states, which in any case would have the right to strike deals with the Centre before integration into the Union. The government in Delhi would be weak; with power being transferred to so many different points in the country, it was difficult to see how an ineffectual and contradiction-ridden central government could prevent the civil wars and chaos that would break India into chunks, large and small. (We need to remember that, even after the partition that came, Hyderabad, Kashmir and Junagadh remained outside Delhi's control.) At least a dozen confused nations would emerge, at the very minimum, through this plan. Kashmir, Bhopal and Hyderabad could easily have become independent, not to mention Travancore. There could have been an independent Bengal, and there certainly would have been two Punjabs. The fissiparous tendencies that this in turn would generate can only be imagined. All this was going to be unveiled

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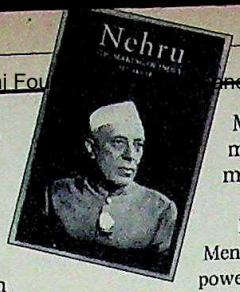

on 17 May. The ifs of history sometimes stagger one. What if there had been another Viceroy, hostile to Nehru? What if Mountbatten himself had not been sympathetic to the idea of Indian unity? One must appreciate that even he, the most pro-Congress Viceroy of all, had become persuaded that there was no other way to quit India; what if it had been an imperialist like Wavell still in charge? And the biggest if of all: if Mountbatten had not followed his 'hunch'? But Mountbatten went against the advice of his administration to break this historic secret to his friend, at the cost, no doubt, of what many saw as the long-term British interest.

Nehru did not have the remotest suspicion about what he was going to see when he took the file Mountbatten proffered. They continued their conversation, and he began reading it only when he had returned to his bedroom. He was horrified. Shaking with rage, he stormed into Krishna Menon's room, unable to compose himself. He felt cheated, betrayed. So far the only plan the British had discussed with him had been V.P. Menon's, which of course had Patel's approval too. On 8 and 9 May they had formally discussed these proposals at meetings which included V.P. Menon. But even this Indian ICS officer did not breathe a word about the alternative scheme which was certain to Balkanize India, because he was under strict instructions not to. Theories of conspiracy are no longer fashionable, but if the reader has another word for it, he or she is welcome to use it. As recently as that very morning, on 10 May, details were being discussed formally between Nehru, Mountbatten, Mieville, V.P. Menon and Crum at the Viceregal Lodge. The minutes of the Viceroy's eleventh miscellaneous meeting, which started at 11 a.m., begin:

> His Excellency the Viceroy explained that Rao Bahadur Menon had been working on a scheme for the early transfer of power on a Dominion status basis long before he (His Excellency) arrived in India. He said that he would like to give Rao Bahadur Menon an opportunity of explaining the outline of his scheme to himself and Pandit Nehru together. Rao Bahadur Menon said that he had mentioned the scheme to Pandit Nehru the day before; and also four months previously to Sardar Patel. Both had appeared extremely anxious for the early transfer of power.

At that meeting Nehru accepted transfer of power on the basis of dominion status, and though he claimed that the only real difficulty would be in regard to Pakistan, he said it was now clear Pakistan would have to be conceded. Menon said power would broadly be handed over to two central governments, with their own governors-general, with government on the basis of a suitably amended Government of India Act 1935, till the constituent assemblies could work out their own constitutions. Mountbatten remarked that this process should not be too difficult.

Mountbatten then officially wrote to Nehru:

> I have now reached certain conclusions with which I have reason to believe H.M.G. will agree. I should like to have a final talk about

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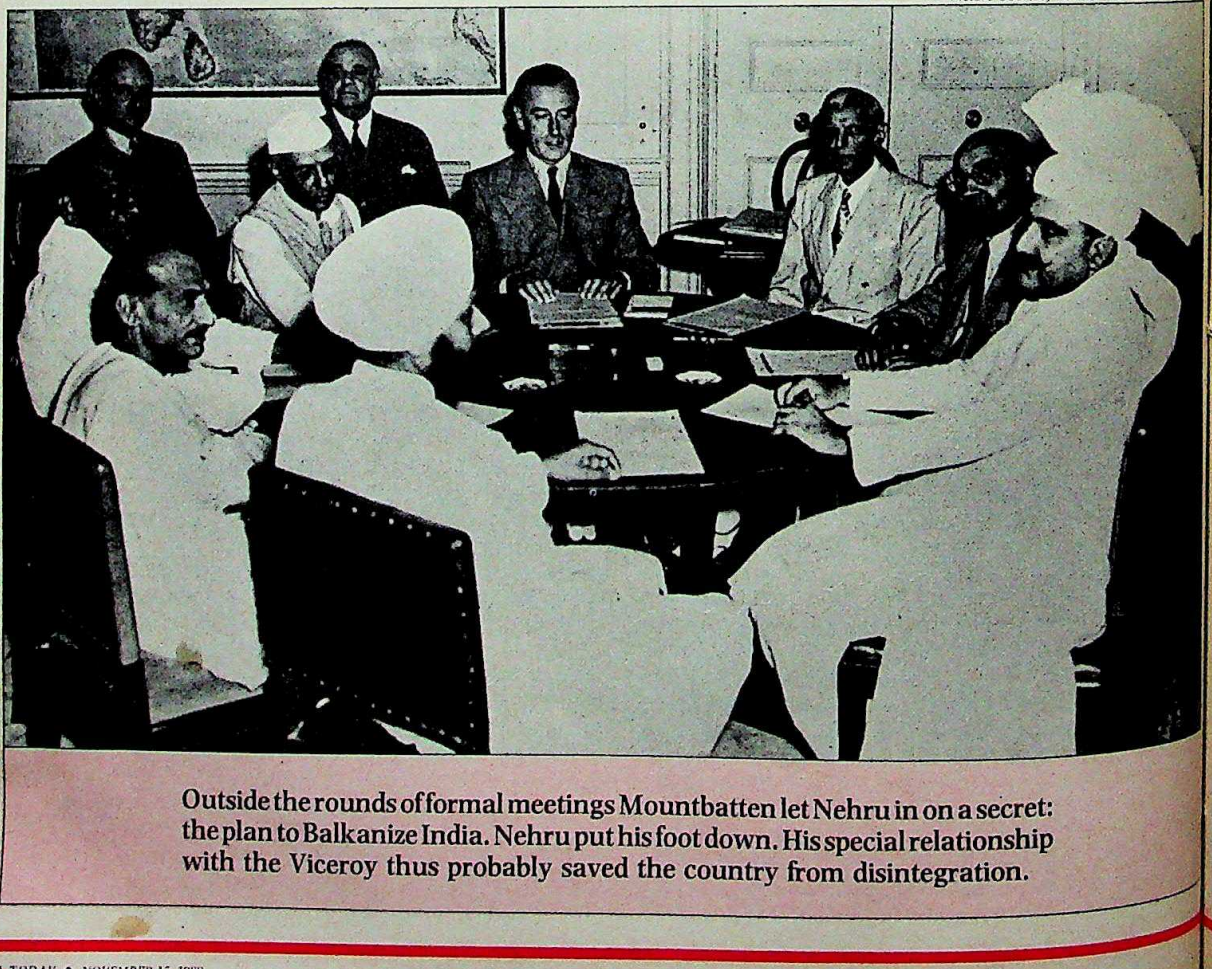

Outside the rounds of formal meetings Mountbatten let Nehru in on a secret: the plan to Balkanize India. Nehru put his foot down. His special relationship with the Viceroy thus probably saved the country from disintegration.

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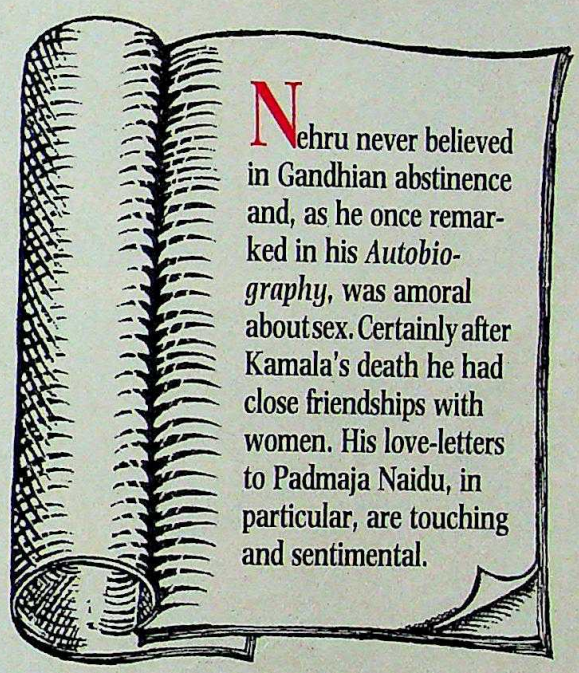
these conclusions before they are announced and I am therefore inviting the following in addition to yourself, to meet me round the table in Delhi at 10.30 a.m. on 17th May: Sardar Patel, Mr Jinnah, Mr Liaqat Ali Khan and Sardar Baldev Singh.

The States Negotiating Committee got a differently styled invitation: at 10.30 Saturday 17 May the Viceroy proposed to start the timetable, and end it with an announcement in Parliament at 1600 hours Tuesday 20 May. A delay of forty-eight hours might be conceded, but no further, as Parliament would rise for the Whitsuntide recess on 23 May.

When V.P. Menon saw Nehru on the morning of 11 May, he recalls in his memoirs, 'I found that his usual charm and smile had deserted him and that he was obviously upset.' It was a civil servant's understatement. But Nehru was in no mood to talk to a civil servant. He rushed a 'Personal and Secret' letter to Mountbatten. The proposals, he said, had 'produced a devastating effect upon me...The whole approach was completely different from what ours had been and the picture of India that emerged frightened me...a picture of fragmentation and conflict and disorder, and, unhappily also, of a worsening of relations between India and Britain.' Nehru could not wait to 'give you some indication of how upset I have been by these proposals which, I am convinced, will be resented and bitterly disliked all over the country' (*Transfer of Power*, Vol. 10, pp. 756-7). He sent a long note later, in which he charged London with completely abandoning every previous decision and pledge, of virtually scrapping the Constituent Assembly, of vitiating the central authority which could protect the nation and of engineering the Balkanization of India through successor states which would conclude treaties with Delhi on one side and His Majesty's Government on the other, breeding a rash of Ulsters on Indian soil.



Nehru never believed in Gandhian abstinence and, as he once remarked in his *Autobiography*, was amoral about sex. Certainly after Kamala's death he had close friendships with women. His love-letters to Padmaja Naidu, in particular, are touching and sentimental.

NEHRU'S violent opposition shook Mountbatten. However, he was now, as he told V.P. Menon, glad he had shown the draft to Nehru and admitted that it would have been disastrous if he had not done so. Menon advised that the best course now was to return and proceed according to his plan. At 11.30 on 11 May a meeting was called by the Viceroy—Jenkins, Mieville and Erskine Crum attending—to discuss Nehru's 'most disturbing' response. (Incidentally, item 3 of this meeting reveals how the Muslim League used power and why it so desperately wanted it. I quote from the Minutes of the Viceroy's Twelfth Miscellaneous Meeting: 'His Excellency the Viceroy asked Sir Evan Jenkins why the Nawab of Mamdot had asked to form a ministry in the Punjab. Sir Evan Jenkins explained that the Nawab of Mamdot was a very stupid man. He was under the influence of some younger men, who were in a fanatical mood. They evidently thought if the Muslim League could take power, they would be able to withdraw the proceedings which were being taken against Muslims and to use the police force, which was 70 per cent Muslim, to suppress the Sikhs.

Mountbatten then met Nehru alone and agreed that Jinnah would get his Pakistan, with Punjab and Bengal truncated. But power in the rest of the country would be handed to only one central successor government.

FRIENDS AND LOVERS

The first Vicereine whom Jawaharlal Nehru charmed was Lady Eugenie Wavell, but since she was old, fat and motherly there was never any gossip. After his first long talk with Wavell, on 2 July 1945, Jawaharlal had 'stopped to tea with Q., Archie John and the staff; and they all like him' (from Wavell's *Journal*; he used to call his wife Queenie, hence the Q.) Nehru would swim in the Viceregal Palace during Wavell's time too, but a buzz was heard only when Lady Mountbatten shared the pool. Nehru was far more intimate with the Mountbattens, and enough has been said about their personal friendship for there to be much need for reiteration here. However, everyone wants to know the answer to the Great Question: was the Edwina-Jawaharlal relationship platonic or not? Mountbatten's favourite authors Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre discreetly skirt the issue in their book tingling with revelations about others, *Freedom at Midnight*, in what is certainly a deferential gesture to the Earl. Mountbatten's official biographer Philip Ziegler is delicate towards the Lady in his classic *Mountbatten* (1985): 'Her close relationship with Nehru did not begin until the Mountbattens were on the verge of leaving India.' Just enough said, and a very good point made: that the politics of the transfer of power had very little to do with the quality of *this* close relationship.

The nearest this author has come to an answer to the Great Question is this lovely story from Rusi Mody, who has capped a brilliant executive career as the powerful chief executive of the mammoth business empire, Tata Steel. He had met, said Rusi Mody, Jawaharlal thrice—and each time Nehru did not speak a word to him. The first occasion was during a visit Nehru made to the steel factory at Jamshedpur. As a junior executive, Rusi Mody stood at the bottom of the receiving line and got a silent handshake before the great man continued to the next person. The second time was during the meal that day. Nehru was sitting at the VIP table, and Rusi was, along with other juniors, serving. He went up to Nehru and asked if he would like more chicken. His mouth full, Nehru nodded a silent thank you and returned to his food. The third occasion was at Nainital, where Sir Homi Mody was governor of UP after freedom. The Prime Minister had come to the hills for a short holiday and was staying with the governor. Sir Jehangir was very pukka, and when the gong sounded at eight he instructed his son to go to the Prime Minister's bedroom and tell him dinner was ready. Rusi Mody marched up, opened the door and saw Jawaharlal and Edwina in a clinch. Jawaharlal Nehru looked at Rusi Mody and grimaced. Rusi quickly shut the

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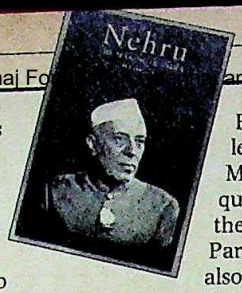


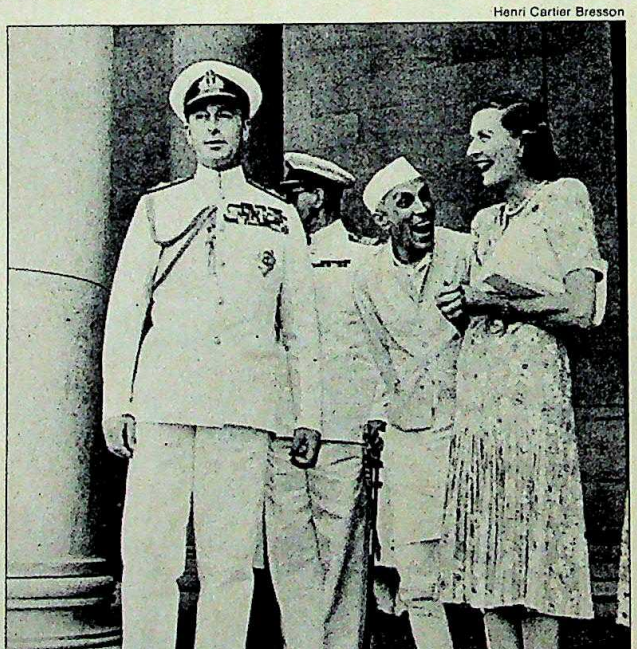
door and walked out. Once again, not a word was exchanged.

Be it on record that the first Prime Minister of India and the last Vicereine of India came promptly to dinner.

When the Mountbattens came to Delhi their marriage was already in trouble. The burden of this job did not help matters. Moreover, Edwina wanted to be as active a Vicereine as her husband was Viceroy, and both were determined to leave a very good impression. One of the first things they did on arrival was to cut the portions served during their meals as a gesture to the famine still stalking India, an idea that would not have occurred to Wavell. They also vastly increased the number of Indians on their guest-lists. Within a fortnight of their arrival they even had Aruna Asaf Ali for tea. Violently anti-British, she needed a prod from Gandhi to accept, but once she met Edwina the two became very good friends. The Mountbattens tried to woo Jinnah too, but the initial response was cold. In contrast, both found Nehru eloquent, warm and human. Nehru had been impressed by the political sense and personal regard the Mountbattens had shown in Singapore; in Delhi the relationship flowered into a genuine friendship that aroused all manner of suspicion. Their relationship is best caught in a photograph taken by Henri-Cartier Bresson in Delhi in 1948. Mountbatten, in full white admiral's uniform, stands at ease in front, while a step behind him, Jawaharlal and Edwina are laughing loudly at a shared joke: Edwina's laughter circumscribed by some British reserve, but Jawaharlal laughing whole-heartedly, stooping naturally with the effort but looking still at Edwina's face.

The accusation has been too often made, however, that the personal friendship between the two influenced the course of political events. Jinnah gave currency to it first, in his private-public accusations of Mountbatten's 'favouritism' towards Nehru.

Henri Cartier Bresson



The women Nehru romanced included Padmaja and Edwina. His attitude towards sex was neither prudish nor hypocritical.

From some Congress quarters the virulence was no less vicious, with allegations made of a Nehru-Mountbatten conspiracy to solve the problem quickly, using partition as the easiest recourse, so that the ageing Congressmen could get their day in power. Part of the hostility, at least on the Congress side, surely also derived from an inability to appreciate the nuances of a Western attitude to man-woman relationships. Nehru never believed in Gandhian abstinence and, as he once remarked in his *Autobiography*, was amoral about sex. Certainly after Kamala's death he had close friendships with women. His love-letters to Padmaja, in particular, are often quite touching and honestly sentimental though never soppy. The appendix of Vol.13 of *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, 1972, contains a good selection of such letters to 'Bebee dear'. On 2 March 1938 Nehru wrote to Padmaja from Lucknow:

> You made me promise to write to you, Foolish one, as if a promise was needed, or as if a promise means anything. Would you have me write to you just to keep that promise even though the desire was lacking? And could you prevent me from writing, short of commanding me to do so and my believing in your command, if the desire to write to you moved me? I shall write to you, as I have written in the past, even when you have not replied. For I write, selfish and self-centred as I am, to please myself, though in my vanity I imagine that I might be giving you some pleasure also. You will not write to me, you tell me, lest you say something which might hurt. A word of yours has power to hurt, but have you thought of the pain of having no word from you? Have you thought of the loneliness that is my life, of the shell in which I live, encompassed and cut off, and from which I seek escape in activity?

Ending with 'My love to you', this billet-doux has a flourish as a postscript: 'The flowers are aflame and send

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you greetings.' But it is the beginning which is a true gem. It was written in reply to a rather long personal telegram from Padmaja. Nehru begins: 'My dear, your telegram has reached me. How foolish and womanlike and extravagant. Or was it a kind of *prayaschitta* or atonement for having made love to Subhas?' The two middle-aged heroes, Nehru and Bose, were obviously competitors in more than politics.

Though edging towards fifty in 1937 Nehru was quite infatuated by the daughter of the family friend, Sarojini. On 18 November 1937 he wrote to Padmaja from Allahabad:

> How terribly near you are all the time to me since the Ajanta Princess (a representation of the sculpture of the Ajanta caves) has come and taken possession of my room. Why is it that I think of you whenever I look at it?.. How old are you now? Twenty? Oh, my dear, how infantile we are even though the years steal over us. How I long to see your dear face.

Twenty was obviously a personal joke, for Padmaja was born in 1900. On 29 September 1937 Nehru warned her to mark her letters to him 'Personal' to save them from being read by his secretary. The affair continued for many years, maturing gently with time. On 15 December 1940 Nehru wrote to Padmaja: 'It was good to see you. Keep growing younger and thus make up for those who grow older.'

...A charismatic personality's reputation is rarely safe in his lifetime; after it, any scoundrel can mock, through the well-known tactics of hint, nudge and half-suppressed smile. Since such stories have become part of the Nehru legend it is necessary for a biographer to confront them, rather than choose the easier option of evasion. Three points, however, do stand out. First, that Nehru was not a hypocrite: he made no secret of the fact that he lived by a value system which did not consider sex to be a moral sin. Second, Gandhi, who was sharp enough to know what was going on, never demanded *brahmacharya* from a man he nurtured as his heir. This could only be because Gandhi was convinced that Jawaharlal never allowed his private life to interfere with his public one. Third, the people of India could not care less. The propaganda about Nehru's 'affairs' was carried out by his enemies (in the Congress more than outside) from the time of the 1937 elections onwards in the effort to poison the masses against him, but the people cheated the gossip-mongers by their indifference to such stories. Jawaharlal Nehru led the Congress in four general elections: 1937, 1952, 1957 and 1962. Over a quarter century, through high drama and low, glorious achievement and stunning, dazing tragedy, he never lost the love and trust of those to whom he had given his life: the people of his country.

During one of Nehru's trips to Nainital, Rusi Mody—sent to call him down for dinner—marched up, opened the door and saw Nehru and Edwina in a clinch. Nehru looked at Rusi and grimaced. Rusi quickly shut the door and walked out.

GREATER THAN HIS DEEDS

Caesars should die suddenly. A slow death hypnotizes them, reduces them. They stare at it, in still fascination. They cannot fight the inevitable, but will not surrender before it either. Jawaharlal Nehru was too proud to be afraid of death, but as he said so often he wanted the end to come quickly; he wanted to work on the last day of his life. The shadow of death fell across Nehru's vision on 6 January 1964. The sixty-eighth session of the Congress had just begun at Bhubaneswar with Kamaraj Nadar as president. When Nehru reached the venue of the session, named Gopabandhunagar, at 3.30 on the afternoon of 5 January he had some reason for relief: a major crisis in Kashmir had been resolved with the recovery of a strand of the Prophet Muhammad's beard, a relic which was found to be missing from the Hazratbal shrine on the night of 26-27 December. The crowds were there of course along the three-mile route from the airport to the Raj Bhavan, where he was staying, as he drove in an open car. But he was not looking well at all. There was an unhealthy puffiness in the face; the eyes had sunk; and his step was slow. It was little wonder that this session was rife with stories about the succession. The *Hindusthan Standard* reported on 6 January:

> There is a move to create the post of deputy Prime Minister of India. The move has been made by a very powerful section of the Congress High Command. This group has even (*sic*) their choice for this office. Mrs Indira Gandhi appears to be the first choice for this post. Other names mentioned in this connection include Mr Lal Bahadur Shastri and Mr Morarji Desai.

(Indira Gandhi's popularity in the party was borne out when she got the highest number of votes in the elections for Kamaraj's working committee, but the two senior men were far ahead of her in the prime ministerial stakes.)

They first kept the news secret, but it was no use. Too many people had seen Nehru being helped up by Indira and an aide as he suddenly left the meeting of the subjects committee. The *Standard* carried a photograph of the incident, which was destined to become famous. On 7 January an official communique at seven in the evening again tried to hide the truth, saying it was only high blood pressure due to strain; he had been advised complete rest. No one was fooled. Jawaharlal Nehru had suffered a stroke. He did not participate in the rest of the session, and his ministerial work was temporarily divided between Gulzari Lal Nanda and T.T. Krishnamachari (who took charge of external affairs). The country sensed what had happened, though Indira Gandhi kept a brave and cheerful face in public. The photograph in the *Hindusthan Standard* had revealed too much. Telegrams and messages came in their thousands, and when Nehru was fit enough to be flown to Delhi his arrival was kept secret both to stop the crowds and to prevent journalists from taking pictures. Yet the complete rest that the doctors had advised was simply beyond Nehru's temperament.

As soon as he reached Delhi, Nehru asked for a situation report on the horrible riots taking place in Calcutta, with Muslims being killed and driven out of their *bustees* as had not

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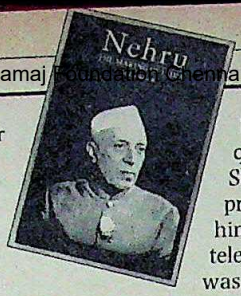


been done since 1950. Communalism: this cancer which had wasted so much of his life, this awful plague which had swept Delhi at the beginning of his prime ministership, was still consuming him in his last months. Nehru would not rest because he could not rest. Ambassador T.N. Kaul remembers him saying angrily when he heard that Soviet doctors had advised a longer convalescence, 'Let them go to hell. If I lie down in bed for even a week, I know I will not get up!' He began, as it were, to clean his table; he knew that the last phase had begun and did not want to leave loose ends for the successor he would not anoint by naming. In his last weeks he even tried to find a way out of the miserably tangled Kashmir thicket by releasing the Sheikh, involving Jaya Prakash and setting in motion a round of talks which seemed to promise a dramatic denouement. (Pakistan, however, was only playing along, waiting for the moment to strike and try to seize Kashmir by force from an India weakened by China.)

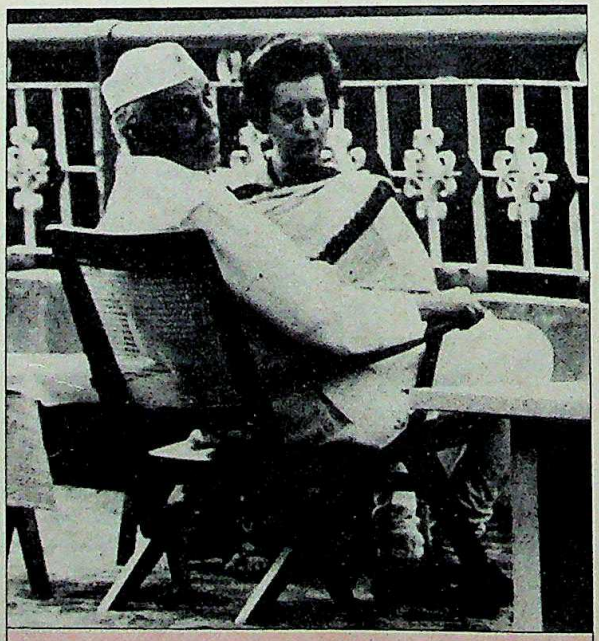
One day in May—no one knows which—Jawaharlal had, as was his habit of so many years, jotted down lines of poetry which appealed to his mood. These were four famous lines from Robert Frost, lines which would become many times more famous when they were found on Nehru's table after he died:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.
And miles to go before I sleep.

THE LAST MOMENTS

The press conference was originally scheduled for Wednesday 20 May 1964 but was postponed to Friday the 22nd. It was his first press conference in six months, the first since the stroke at Bhubaneswar. He seemed fine, but his voice was weak. It lasted only thirty-eight minutes, with just about half an hour for questions, the briefest ever press conference by Jawaharlal Nehru. As usual, he answered a whole range of questions, but the main concentration was on Sheikh Abdullah's efforts to settle the Kashmir problem. The last question however, was, as Nehru himself put it, a leading one. Referring to a recent television interview in which Nehru had said that he was not grooming his daughter as his successor, a correspondent asked whether it was not preferable that he settle the question in his lifetime. Reclining in his chair, a smiling Jawaharlal Nehru replied, 'My life is not going to end so soon.' There were more than 300 journalists present. They thumped their desks and cheered. Jawaharlal went off to Dehra Dun for his last holiday after that press conference.

> **Communalism: this cancer which had wasted so much of his life, this awful plague which had swept Delhi at the beginning of his prime ministership, was still consuming him in his last months. Nehru would not rest because he could not.**



If ever the love of a father and daughter could be portrayed on film, this was it...a picture taken on the last evening of his life.

There is a photograph of Indira Gandhi with her father taken in Dehra Dun on 26 May. He is seated in an armchair on the balcony, and she is kneeling on the floor beside him, her face towards the camera but her eyes looking down. Jawaharlal is looking back, a little surprised by the cameraman from behind. Perhaps one reads meanings into a moment which were never meant to be, but if ever a photograph could portray the last evening of one's life, this was it. And if ever the love of a father and a daughter could be recorded on mere film, then this must be it. They returned to Delhi that evening.

That night he worked as usual, clearing all the papers on his desk. The night would claim him. The time had come to go to sleep, whatever promises might be left unfulfilled, however many more miles he might have wanted to walk in his beloved India. At 6.25 on the morning of 27 May, his normal time to wake, he opened his eyes in pain. His doctors found a rupture of the abdominal aorta. He soon became unconscious. He did not open his eyes again. At two in the afternoon he was declared dead.

Nehru: The Making of India
by M.J. Akbar
Viking, Rs 350; Pages 591
Distributor: Rupa & Co.

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TAMIL NADU

Purveyors of Pulp

Tamil literature degenerates into pot-boilers

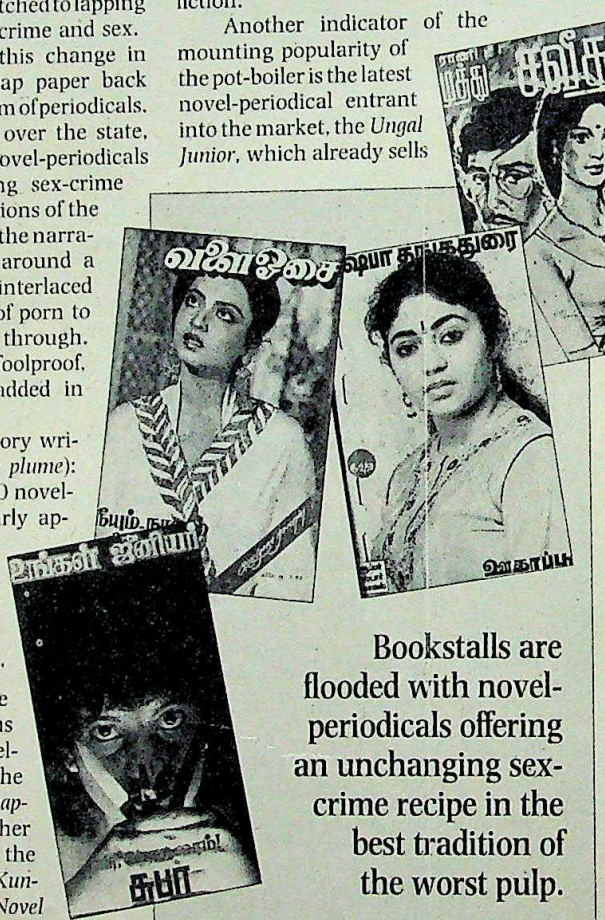
IN an avalanching trend, the Tamil reader is succumbing to the lurid appeal of pulp as never before. From perusing highly didactic and moralistic outpourings of literary prose, the average Tamil reader has switched to lapping up steamy pastiches of crime and sex.

The harbingers of this change in reading tastes are cheap paper back issues of novels in the form of periodicals. Flooding bookstalls all over the state, these 60- to 100-page novel-periodicals rely on an unchanging sex-crime recipe. In the best traditions of the worst pulp world-wide, the narrative is loosely woven around a murder or a rape, and is interlaced with explicit passages of porn to see the reader happily through. To make the formula foolproof, blood and gore are added in generous measure.

Says Tamil short story writer, Kedhar (a *nom de plume*): "There are now over 50 novel-periodicals that regularly appear. Out of these, about 10 to 15 are short-lived. After a few months they close down and another 10 or so new ones appear." And sure enough, in the last couple of months alone, three new novel-periodicals have hit the stands—*Valaiosai*, *Oothappu* and *Ungal Junior*. Other imaginative titles in the market are: *Mona*, *Kunkumachimizh*, *Crime*, *A Novel Time* and *Pocket Novel*.

Like many other skewed enterprises, the genesis of the novel-periodical in Tamil was an effort aimed at nobler things. The pioneering novel-periodical *Ranimuthu* intended to publish abridged versions of great works of literature, priced well within the reach of the common man. Begun in 1969, *Ranimuthu*, however, floundered five years later when the publishers of the leading Tamil weekly *Kumudam* started their own novel publication, *Malaimadhi*. Specialising in pulp, *Malaimadhi* proved a resounding success, and *Ranimuthu* promptly followed suit by opting for the market. Today, still priced at a modest Rs 1.75 per copy, each issue of *Ranimuthu* sells about two lakh copies, and instead of literary fare, dishes out popular fiction.

Another indicator of the mounting popularity of the pot-boiler is the latest novel-periodical entrant into the market, the *Ungal Junior*, which already sells around 30,000 copies per issue. The fact that the novel-periodicals are mass-printed has much to do with such sales. As writer Kedhar puts it: "If you are waiting to catch a bus or train, you just part with a two-rupee note, pick up your novel and read it during the journey."



Bookstalls are flooded with novel-periodicals offering an unchanging sex-crime recipe in the best tradition of the worst pulp.

Doubtless, this means that the audience for serious fiction is slowly being eaten into. Says Indumathi Rangan, a popular Tamil novelist: "Paper back monthly novels have really mushroomed. One doesn't find many books of serious fiction these days. It is all formula writing and there is very little of the creative element left."

Predictably, for several, the pulp boom has meant eldorado. Many moonlighting novelists have become full-time novelists. Of these, Rajesh Kumar, who tops the bestseller lists has recently quit his job with the Tamil Nadu Agriculture Department to concentrate on writing. D. Suresh and A.N. Balakrishnan, two bank employees who constitute a writing team under the pseudonym 'suba', are also of the opinion that full-time novel writing is a more lucrative proposition than working with banks. Their reckoning is sound, for the payment for a novel ranges between Rs 2,000 and Rs 5,000, and full-time writers are capable of churning out as many as four to five novels a month for different periodicals.

But serious writers like Kedhar are alarmed by the growing popularity of the monthly novel, and regard it as an index of the mounting cultural degeneration. Says he: "There is no subtlety, no human sentiment, no exploration of relationships. It is out and out sensationalism." Y. Subramanyan, a renowned short story writer and novelist, voices a similar litany: "The monthly novel is nothing but a means of courting cheap popularity by pandering to the low and the mean. It is not literature at all."

Surprisingly, some of these writers do have secret literary aspirations. Pulp purveyors like Suresh and Balakrishnan argue that "it is the height of snobbery to assume that whatever is popular cannot be good". Indumathi treads carefully. Says she: "The cult of the monthly novel is good in that it has encouraged the reading habit. It has encouraged rickshaw-pullers and slum-dwellers to read. Still, it should be a transitional stage in the community's literary evolution, a bridge between Agatha Christie and Ayn Rand, Alistair Maclean and Arthur Miller. But it is becoming an end in itself and that is bad."

While literary savants and the pulp producers involve themselves in pedantic exercises, the pot-boiler continues to live up to its glorious role—and an increasing Tamilian readership lasciviously drools its way through them.

—S.H. VENKATRAMANI

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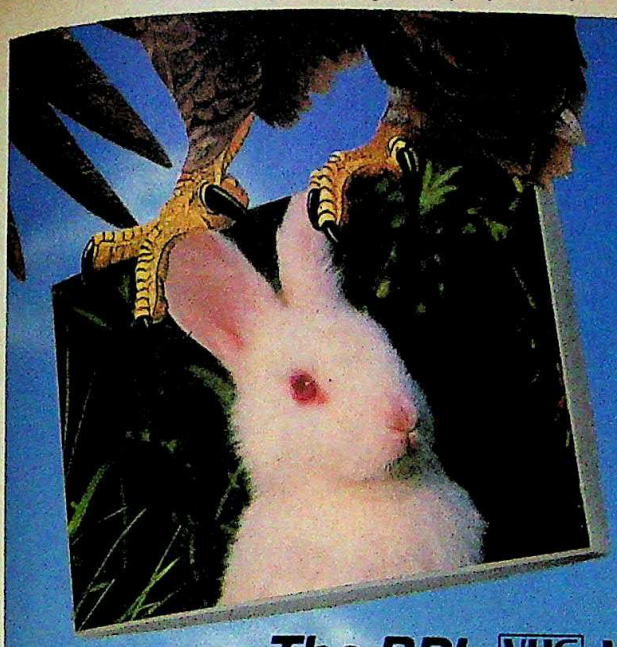

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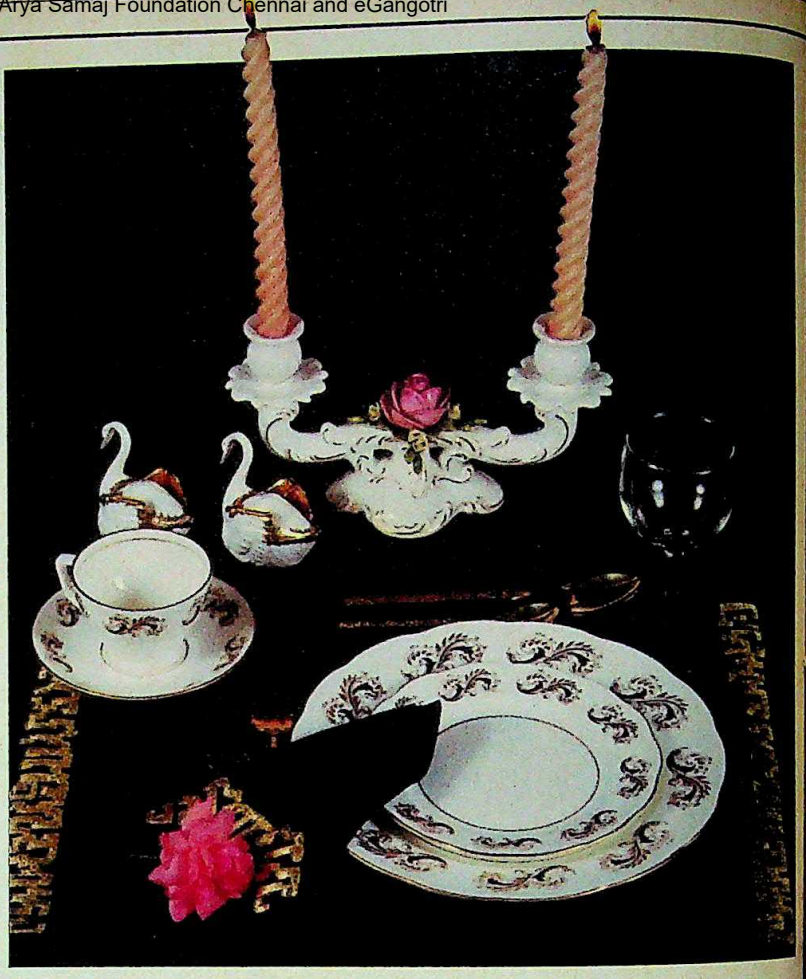
CROCKERY

The China Syndrome

A new range of tableware enters Indian homes



THERE was that fine china dinner-set from Harrods. So elegant, it would stand locked in a stately glass cupboard through the year. The lady of the house would bring it out for her very special parties, dust it herself and then hold her breath through dinner lest a plate should break.

Or there was the Indian crockery, tent-house type, fat, practical, and so boring. Always a white-washed white with a green line that ran around the edge. Day after day it appeared on the dining table like a dowdy old matron.

In the last few years, something's been brewing in Indian crockery—and it's not just tea. There is a whole new range of home-made bone china that has begun to emulate its English peer in design, shine and shape. The feel of the lip on the cup is smooth and the clink of the cup on the saucer is sharp, both tests of fine quality. This crockery is no old matron, it demands to be treated, well, more like a lady.

Along with designer *durries*, indoor plants, and Husain's horses, bone china has become a hallmark of good living. It is not just what you eat but how you present food that has become one of the acid tests of elegance. So-so won't do anymore. Thus, a variety of designs has surfaced in crockery stores that range from the old grandma roses to jet-age geometrics.

Ved Kapoor, chairman of Hitkari Potteries is baffled. His turnover has risen from Rs 6 crore 10 years ago to Rs 18 crore today. "Even I'm surprised that people are buying so much bone china despite its being so expensive," he says. "Sales have been going up and up in the last five years." In fact, last year hitkari managed to sell coal to Newcastle: it exported its china to England where it now sells in stores on *Oxford Street*.

Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

If today it is a booming market—growing from 15 to 20 per cent—seven years ago, bone china was a very sleepy industry, ruled only by Hitkari. A dozen designs were repeated and re-repeated and the question of exports did not arise. A British engineer brought fine china technology to the company and for the first time, the cup began looking up. "Export opened our eyes to international quality and design," says Kapoor who now sells in Canada, Holland, Australia and the US.

As Hitkari began leap-frogging in the export market (Rs 2.5 crore last year), it stirred interest back home. A few years ago Crown Ceramics came into the picture and last year, half a dozen new companies fell into the market, most set up by former Hitkari men. "The market used to be so monotonous," says R.K. Singhi, managing director of Crown (turnover: Rs 2 crore). "Now you must do something different if you want to exist."

China is only a small chunk of the crockery market—but it is the one where the revolution is taking place. Delicate and soft, it can absorb a variety of fancy designs that leaves stoneware looking as plebian as stainless steel. Hotels have kicked off the industry further by demanding better glazes and coordinating colours. "We have a number of buyers who

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keep turning the plates around to make sure they are really made in India," says Rita Oberoi, shop manager of Kitchen Collections, a popular Delhi store.

The result of all this activity is that the cup spilleth over with design. Mugs are the most daring, and the first to break convention. They go all the way from pot-bellied, milky white shapes to new-fangled ones carrying Monet's flowerscapes, bold red patterns that would make an Englishman cringe, and a series of nursery rhymes: Jack Horner in his corner and Bo-peep with her sheep.

Soon, Hitkari will market the Disney characters and Crown will introduce studio pottery in limited editions—"Now my teacup need never look like yours". The key word is exclusivity: hand-painted crockery, a gold streak here, a black twirl there. Or different glazes fusing over the pot. The ultimate cup is scheduled to be black on the outside, white on the inside and

gilded at the rim in pure 14 carat gold. "This is really a sentimental business, it has a lot to do with feelings," says Taruna Singhi of Crown. "If your heart isn't in it you can't churn out good crockery."

Mugs are for impulse buying but dinnerware has to be properly targeted to the buyer. Researchers say you can tell a person's status by the crockery he picks. The upper middle class buyer would head for the soft pink and mauve florals. A higher buyer would pick up white plates edged in black and gold. And highest of all, is also the most elegant crockery of them all: plain white with gold.

With design, the quality is also improving. Good china has a clear tinkle-sound, is light and has to be the exact white. It should be so translucent that if you hold it against the light, you can see your fingers through it. The cup should feel smooth to the lip, and it should blend with the tea. "Many of our designs depend on the sort of tea you're going to drink," says Taruna. "Will it be mixed tea, a liquor tea, a Jasmine tea?"

The trick with selling china is to do it subtly—and a lot of innovative marketing is going into this. Earlier crockery was something—like the perennial Godrej cupboard—your parents gave when you got married. Now the idea is to let it sell itself. Hitkari, for instance, organises parties abroad, quietly using their china to serve the food. It also has a cross-section of women judging new designs before they put them on the market, with an 80 per cent accuracy rate.

Certain things sell well: pink is a best-seller, the more curves a cup has the better, frill your dinner plate and you buy yourself more customers. Kitchen Collections actually lays out a table for two in its shop—chantilly table-cloth, fine china, candles, and all—so you go home thinking of romantic dinners. "We're selling the entire evening," says Oberoi. "Often the person will come back and buy not only the china but everything else too."

A lot of hard thinking has gone into the soft-sell. The concept of coordination is catching on very fast and most crockery companies already make matching napkin holders, flower vases, jam pots, salt and pepper

shakers and linen—"just things that look good on a table". Says Singhi: "Our next phase is selling crockery by mood."

Here everything depends on the season, occasion and time of day. A liquor tea—a light, refreshing morning tea—works best in a light, floral cup. In winter the designs would veer toward the Oriental, reminiscent of the warmth of the east. In summer, cool pastels and plain whites. For a formal dinner: perhaps, black and gold. For an intimate dinner: black and gold and a rose laid alongside. For an informal get-together: rainbow stripes. The idea being that the customer should have not one set, but several. After all, you can't drink your evening tea in the same cup you used in your bed.

Indian bone china is good but it still isn't world class—the china men themselves are the first to admit it. Says Kapoor: "We aren't anywhere near the Wedgewood or Royal Doulton class." The finish is often uneven, the gold transfer technology hasn't been mastered. And vertical cracks sometimes appear, almost overnight, in tea pots. There are no glaze research labs yet and no applied research. Most people work from instinct or ideas from foreign magazines.

Still, the industry has moved from a boring infancy to a wide-awake adolescence that is heading in both, an ultra-modern direction with shapes actually inspired by the Concorde plane—and also back towards the classic English china that grandmother was used to—and the most difficult of all to make: pure white.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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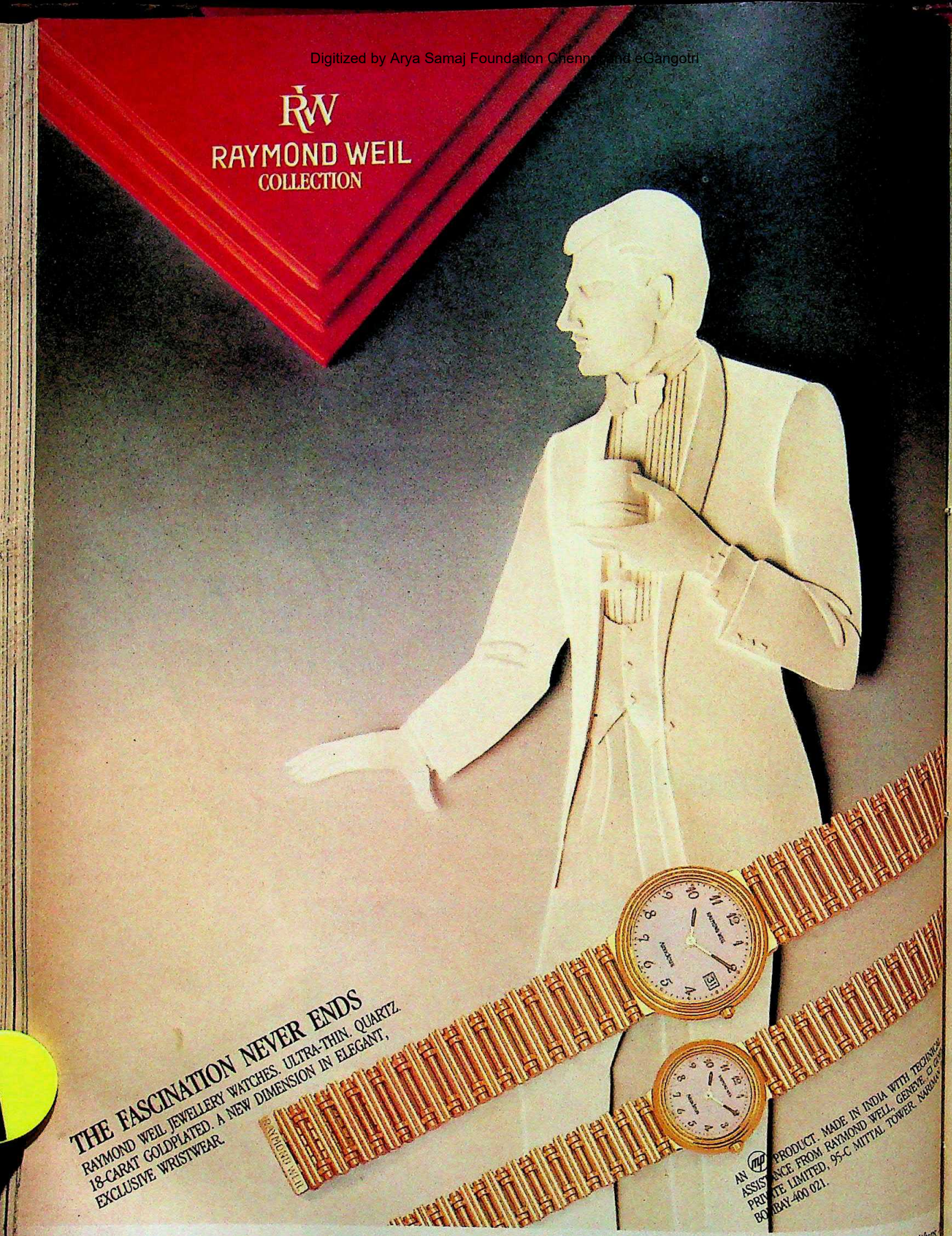

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The Bad News

IT would take a Danny Kaye or an Ingrid Bergman to make Doordarshan news in English interesting, with or without the guiding hand of Bhaskar Ghose. Each night, night after night, the Gazette of India drones on about a ministerial visit here, an inauguration there, a foundation-laying ceremony elsewhere.

Even as propaganda, it is bad. Granted that the prime minister's visits have to be fully covered, particularly as elections approach, the viewer's interest span diminishes in direct proportion to the over-exposure Rajiv Gandhi receives.

One can shout about television being in government hands until one is blue in the face, but it will remain a government monopoly as far in the future as the eye can see, even if the Opposition comes to power. Corporations running radio and Doordarshan would be no help because we know how autonomous our corporations are. Any realistic discussion of the medium must, therefore, take place in the context of television remaining an instrument in official hands.

News, of course, is the most direct instrument in seeking to influence public opinion and hence subject to the greatest distortion. Ordinary news values do not apply, but the Government owes it to itself, if not the country, to make its propaganda less blatant and less painful to watch.

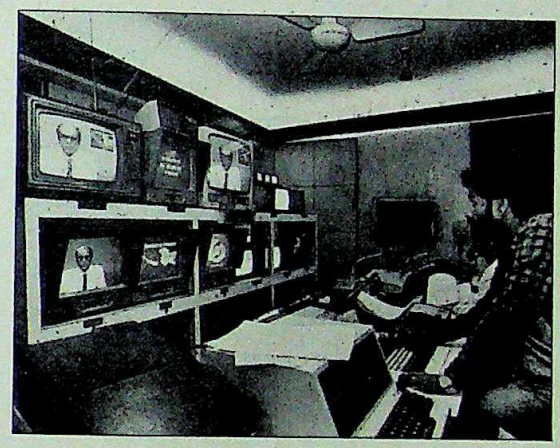
Being a visual medium, television requires three qualifications: a pleasing personality, "legibility" and a presence. Judged by these criteria, all news presenters in English, except one, fail the test. Some fail more miserably than others, but none of them would find a job in any professionally-run television news organisation.

Pankaj Mohan gives the impression of having inadvertently strayed into the news room and seems unable to get over his surprise at being asked to present the news. A more unprepossessing news presenter would be hard to imagine. Gitanjali Aiyar presents news as if she were talking to a group of handicapped children.

Komal G.B. Singh, the most vivacious and best presenter of special programmes, is not cut out to be a news presenter and is wasted in the news room. The one professional news presenter is Rini Simon, who goes about her job with fluency and poise.

Doordarshan's reporters offer stiff competition to the news presenters. Many of them seem to have been recruited only to fill quotas and would not meet the most elementary norms of television reporting. Since there is not much scope for analytical reporting in a government-run television, the least one can expect is that the reporters will speak a language that bears some resemblance to English.

During the prime minister's visit to Turkey, Doordarshan treated us to a discourse by its correspondent that was incomprehensible. And during the last cease-fire mandated by the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, the Doordarshan correspondent spoke a language that had only a nodding acquaintance with English as she is spoke.



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It seems that someone in the Doordarshan set-up has finally realised that the public's patience had been tried enough and has lately spared us the reporter's brand of English by getting the news presenter to read their accounts. Why not go one step further and give the correspondents desk jobs?

The debate on television in the country is unreal because it is based on wrong premises, with the Opposition being almost as culpable as the Government. Opposition protests over the downgrading of the President's address in Doordarshan news were unrelated to any examination of the news value of the other items telecast. What is the point of asking for unfettered television when the opposition parties' own concept is in tune with that of the Government, which promptly apologised for inadvertently letting news value determine Doordarshan news? It is another matter that few take the opposition parties at their word.

The opposition parties justly complain about the bias in Doordarshan news. Only the most negative aspects of opposition activities and statements are highlighted as is, of course, any rare certificate the Opposition chooses to give the Government. In the latter category was the statement of Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal that he was fully satisfied with the Central flood relief assistance offered by Rajiv Gandhi. It was no surprise that Devi Lal's melodramatic resignation from the chief ministership and its prompt withdrawal duly featured in Doordarshan news.

But the most surrealistic news-related programme must surely be the day's commentary on parliamentary proceedings when the two houses are in session. It is little more than a laundry list of the MPs who spoke in Parliament during the day, rattled off at breakneck speed. It makes no attempt at giving a rounded picture of a day's parliamentary proceedings. But the MPs are happy because their names have figured in the list. One wonders if any member of the public pays the slightest heed to this programme.

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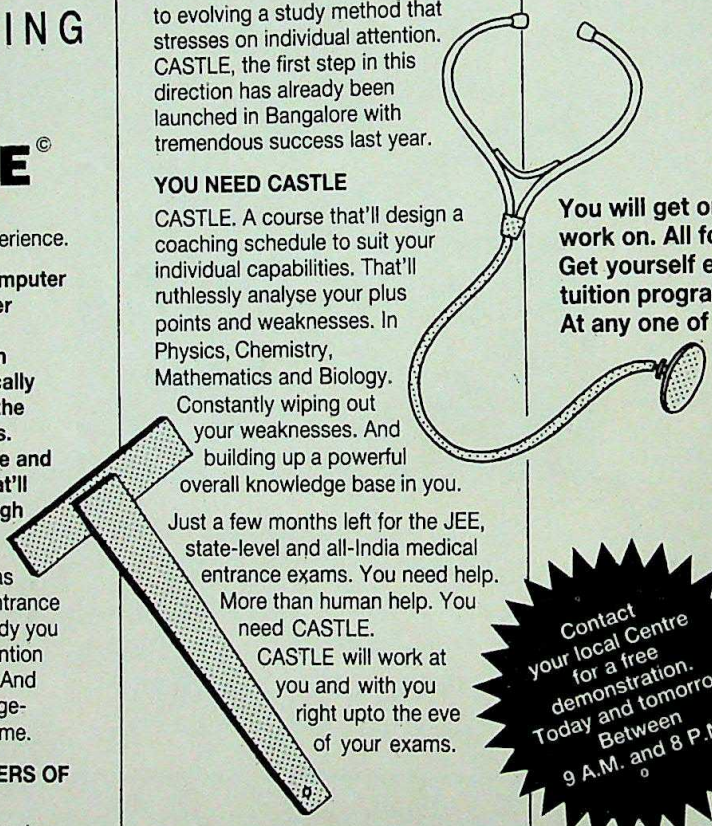

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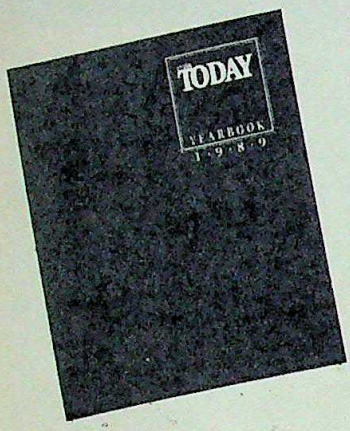

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DAYAVAN

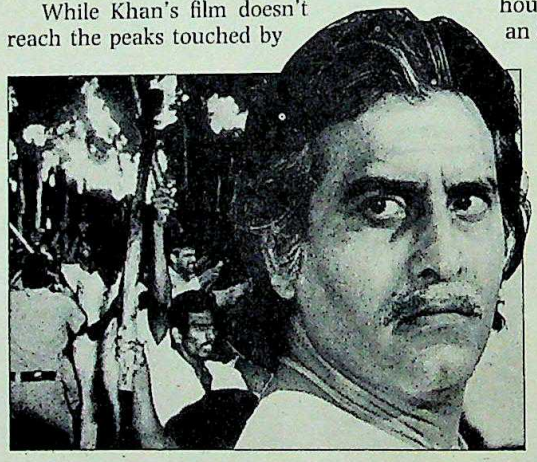
Violent Messiah

The Don in a Hindi avatar

AT the end, his grandchild asks Shakti Velu Dayavan: "Are you a good man or a bad man ?" He pauses and says simply: "I don't know." Shakti Velu inhabits a world where he is both, a messiah and a killer, a world where there is no right or wrong. And no judge.

Dayavan is a big film about a big man. When director Feroz Khan set out to remake the Tamil classic *Nayakan*—based on the life of Bombay's underworld don Varadarajan Mudaliar, he set himself a formidable task. As he himself said: "I had to better an acclaimed masterpiece."

While Khan's film doesn't reach the peaks touched by *Nayakan*, it is still the best film he has made. The gloss is all there but the western tints of *Apradh* and *Qurbani* are gone. This one belongs to India.



Vinod Khanna as the don

A lonely boy arrives in Bombay after having killed a cop. He goes on to become, Hindi film style, the saviour of the slums. Police-inspector Rattan Singh (Amrish Puri) rules the area, terrorising the men, and raping the women. In a remarkably restrained scene, Shakti (Vinod Khanna) holds him down in a dirty drain till he chokes to death. The entire village guards him by its silence. Without quite intending to, Shakti becomes a don.

Then, in a strange twist, he goes to Rattan Singh's house and brings up his demented son like his own—because he knows what it's like to lose a father. Perhaps the finest quality of *Dayavan* is that there is a warmth in the film just as the violence begins to chill the heart.

As he rises in power, Shakti acquires a Brandoesque look (even his hair-cut is like Marlon Brando's in *The Godfather*). He plays patron, protects people, fixes elections. His motto: "If something helps four people it is not bad."

There is a fire inside Vinod Khanna. He gets better and better in the role—and as the ageing don, wearing a lungi, chewing paan-masala, he is brilliant. Khanna has also begun to acquire some of the brooding, lonely quality that so distinguished Amitabh Bachchan.

Those who remember Kamal Hasan's mind-blowing performance in *Nayakan* will perhaps be dissatisfied with Khanna—and *Dayavan*. The second film always has to try harder. And *Dayavan* is terribly disjointed in the first half, heaving ahead in staccato-like movements. Shakti meets Madhuri Dixit in a whorehouse, where he helps her with an exam. Next scene he marries her. Similarly, one day he is in a jhuggi, next day in a lovely home. From a suave young don, he suddenly turns into a conventional Tamilian.

But *Dayavan* has its moments. For all its bigness, there is a simplicity about the film. The powerful don lives in a modest, clean home. There are no flashy lights and no johnnies serving Black Label whisky. The relationship between Shakti and his wife is especially touching, beginning with a deep, passionate kiss, unlike any seen in a Hindi film before (the entire hall was silent).

But it is the father-daughter relationship that is the most poignant in the film. Like most underworld men, Shakti cherishes a dream that his children should go straight. He sends them away to boarding-school. When they return as grown-ups, his daughter cringes from the violent—and seemingly unreasonable—world her father inhabits. He reaches out to her but she leaves him.

Many years later he finds her. She is married and has a son, but she will not let her father touch him. As he turns away, his loneliness is complete. He presses the button for the lift, and then absent-mindedly walks down the stairs. It is a heart-rending moment, the sort that lifts a typical masala film above mediocrity.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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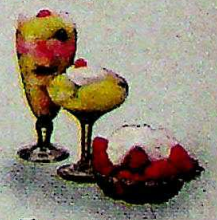

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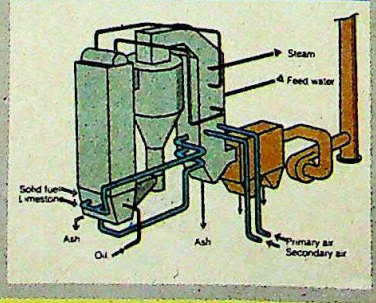

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LAW COMMISSION

Clouds of Controversy

Fresh strain on an already weakened body

ONCE again, the Government that works faster tripped over its own haste. It stirred a legal hornet's nest last month when it announced the appointment of Justice M.P. Thakkar as chairman of the Law Commission. Lawmen were aghast since the judge was still on the Supreme Court bench and the announcement could be interpreted as an executive favour to a sitting judge. The Law Commission is a wing of the Law Ministry, so the Government was in effect promising him a post-retirement job.

At stake was the independence of the judiciary. Supreme Court judges decide cases involving the Government almost every day and Thakkar had nearly a month to go before retirement. Saying that the move "obliterates the distinction between the executive and the judiciary", well-known law professor Upendra Baxi called on Thakkar to "repudiate this offer".

What made Thakkar's appointment even more contentious was his previous association with two controversial commissions of inquiry. He came to be known as the 'Fairfax judge' after heading the commission which held that Finance Ministry officials erred in hiring a US detective firm to investigate economic offences like holding illegal bank accounts. The foreign investigations having taken place when V.P. Singh was finance minister, the commission's findings came in handy for the Rajiv Government to move against officials who had been close to him. Earlier, Thakkar had headed an inquiry into the Indira Gandhi assassination, the report of which he asked the Government to keep secret.

The fear now is that the controversial appointment will further weaken the Law Commission. The body has already lost much of its sheen since the first post-independence commission was set up in 1955. Headed by M.C. Setalvad, it included a host of such luminaries as M.C. Chagla, K.N. Wanchoo, G.S. Pathak and Satyanarayan Rao. By contrast, the outgoing chairman D.A. Desai had only the member-secretary, a Law Ministry official, to work with. "To my mind, that is not really a law commission," says former Supreme Court chief justice P.N. Bhagwati.

No wonder, Law Commission reports now receive scant respect except when they suit the Government's purposes. The 130th report on *benami* transactions earlier this year was promptly turned into law—after the Government had referred the issue to the commission. The *benami* issue, however, was first dealt with by the Law Commission in 1973. Nothing had moved since then, though. So cavalier is the Government's treatment of the commission that the 79th report candidly remarked that a report is often "shelved in pigeon holes where it gathers dust". The Government is still sitting on the seven reports immediately preceding the 130th. The latest, the 131st, too is unlikely to be implemented, for it would mean taking on the ire of lawyers. Still secret, the report holds that lawyers have no business to hold up courts with a strike. Calling it a "monopoly profession", the report recommends a ceiling on lawyers' fees.

By making Thakkar the Law Commission's chairman, the Government was in effect giving a sitting judge a post-retirement job.

"What is the use of having a law commission whose recommendations you are not going to accept?" asks Bhagwati. He recommends a larger commission, containing judges as well as academics. Most important, he says, it should have statutory status. While endorsing the need for a larger commission, Professor P.K. Tripathi of Delhi University holds that statutory status will not make much difference to whether or not reports are implemented. "What matters is the cultural ambience in which you listen to it," he says. The nation seems to have lost its idealistic urge to perfect its democratic systems or even uphold them.

"We think we have provided for the independence of the judiciary but we have not," says Tripathi. Desai's terms of reference emphasised judicial reforms but nobody seems interested in his ideas. He proposed a detailed scheme for 'panchayati judges' who would go to villages, sit with a couple of eminent local residents and settle disputes. "Most cases pertain to village disputes over things like division of land and allocation of water. They can best be decided on the spot rather than in a court 300 miles away," says Desai.

While conservative jurists were sceptical about the panchayati plan, Desai's proposal for an all-India judicial service on the lines of the civil services was widely welcomed. It would recruit a uniformly good cadre to serve mainly as district judges—"the lynchpin of the system", as former commission chairman H.R. Khanna puts it. But the scheme was virtually scuttled at a conference of chief justices last month. Their fear was that the service would lessen the influence of high court chief justices.

Judges and lawyers alike cling to the status quo. Says Bhagwati: "The system needs radical reform. But no one wants it—not the lawyers, not the judges and not the Government. The people want it, but who listens to them?" Unfortunately, finding receptive ears is also the problem of the Law Commission. Under its terms of reference, the next commission is to recommend improvements in 'laws relating to the poor'. A noble thought, certainly. But the question is: Will the clouds of controversy allow Thakkar's recommendations to make a better impact than the earlier ones?

—DAVID DEVADAS

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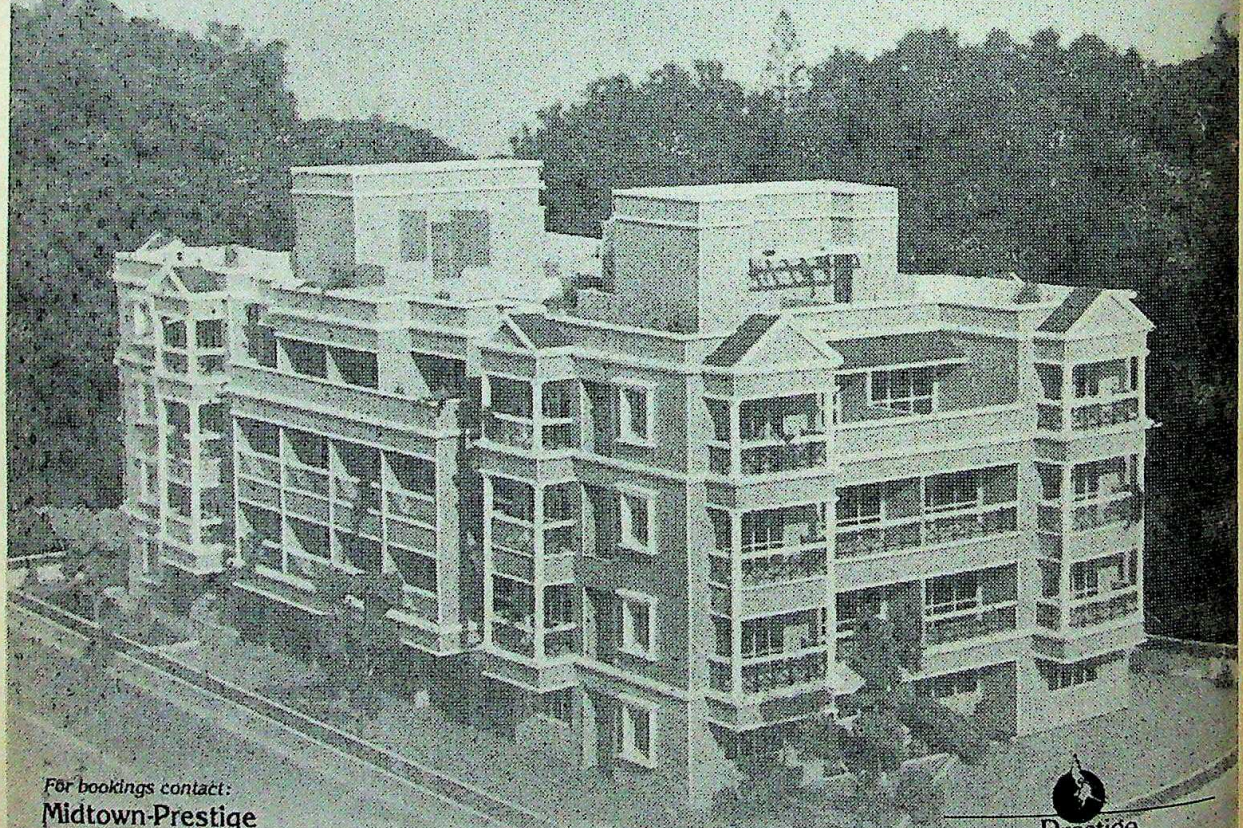

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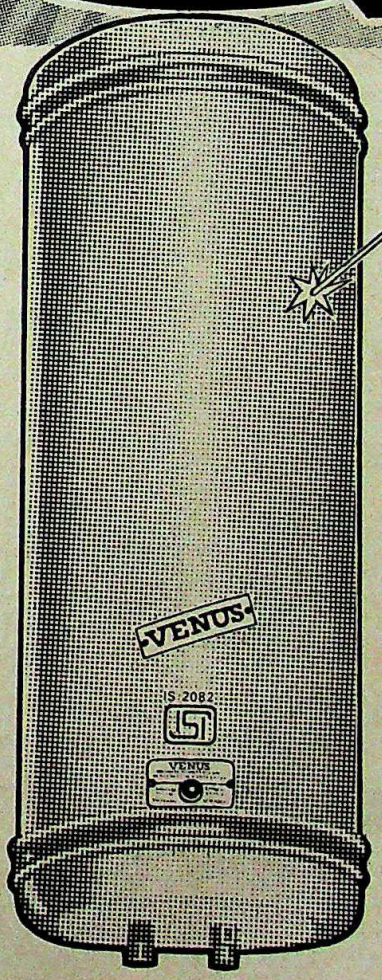

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MEDICINE

The Wonder Beam

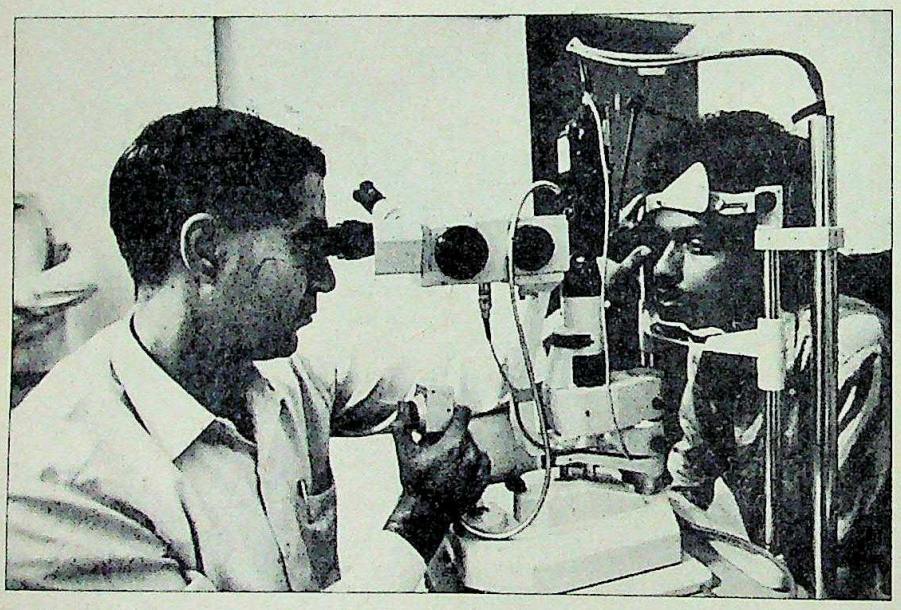
Stitchless surgery comes of age

IT is pitch-dark in a room in the Shroff Charity Eye Hospital, Delhi. Dr Cyrus Shroff switches on his laser which beams a blue-green light. The patient fixes himself before the machine—a surprisingly simple looking gadget—and the surgery begins.

The doctor, his hand poised on the button of the extremely powerful and precise Argon laser, fires. A spark of light—similar to the gas lighter's spark—hits the eye. The patient does not flinch. Ten minutes later, the sitting is over. "It feels like a pin-prick," says Alimuddin, 20, who has come for his third—and perhaps—final sitting. "But it does not hurt."

Alimuddin is a marble-cutter who got a metal piece embedded in his eye. This metal piece made holes in his retina which could later have led to detachment and complete blindness. A few years ago, there was nothing Alimuddin could have done, except await his fate. The Argon, through its intense heat, had sealed the retinal holes. "That is what is best about lasers," says Shroff. "You've now got hope for the person for whom earlier nothing could have been done."

The world of medicine is changing everyday, creating options that are quick, painless and bloodless. The laser—light amplified into a powerful beam of energy—came to India in 1980. Since then its uses, praises—and practitioners—have been slowly increasing. "Everyone wants it today," says Dr A.K. Banerji, professor of neurology at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi. "Its potential is tremendous." Its value in surgery lies in the energy that can be used to cut, coagulate and vaporise tissue without touching it.



Dr Shroff using lasers: ray of hope

While most new techniques take a while to be tested and accepted, the laser has firmly fixed itself as an invaluable tool in eye surgery. It can sear a haemorrhage shut, seal bloody capillaries, or drill a hole in the iris. It can help with the previously incurable Eales' disease, in macular degeneration as well as the more common retinal diseases like diabetic retinopathy. "The sooner a person with diabetes comes for a check-up, the sooner we can prevent complete deterioration of sight," says Shroff. "It's like he's sitting on a time bomb."

But it is in post-cataract treatment—called capsulotomy (cost Rs 1,000)—that the laser really shows its drama. After intraocular lens surgery for cataract—which is becoming very popular since it avoids the need for thick glasses—there is often a blurring of the capsular membrane. The patient fumbles up the stairs, his vision clouded and often unable to even put a teacup easily on the saucer. Here the YAG laser is aimed at the unseeing eye for four minutes—the patient leaves the place with the ability to read the entire eye chart. He does not need a second sitting.

Strangely enough, the most surprising reaction to the laser miracle comes from the eye surgeon himself. "It is becoming too popular. People think it's a magic wand. We cannot make a blind man see, but we can prevent a disease from spreading," says Shroff.

Lasers are also becoming increasingly popular in neurosurgery. At least a dozen centres in the country now use this for vaporising tumors of the spinal cord and the brain stem, the very delicate, lower most part of the brain. "Here it is invaluable, it cannot be matched by anything else," says Banerji. "The laser acts like a surgical knife, but you do not touch tissues so you don't disturb anything." Even the micro-blood vessels that spread like a spider's web over the area are undisturbed. A slip of the surgeon's scalpel, on the other hand, can cause loss of speech, hearing or paralysis.

When Banerji acquired the CO_2 (carbon-dioxide) laser in 1984, he went crazy over it. Wherever the CO_2 strikes, it vaporises. "We used it for everything. It was like putting a starving person before a buffet," he says. The light fantastic—the size of a pin-point—is beamed into previously inaccessible sites of the body. Swiftly, it explodes tumours, unblocks blood vessels and controls bleeding.

Now, however, Banerji is waiting for a better laser: one that synthesises the cutting powers of the CO_2 with the coagulating powers of the YAG. "That's where the future of lasers in neurosurgery lies," he says. "When it can be used to join nerves and to weld blood vessels."

Lasers, however, can be a double-edged tool, life-giving on one side, and lethal on the other. Theoretically lots can go wrong with so much energy in the surgeon's hands. A slight miss, and you can put a hole in the retina, blind a patient or cause an explosion if the spark

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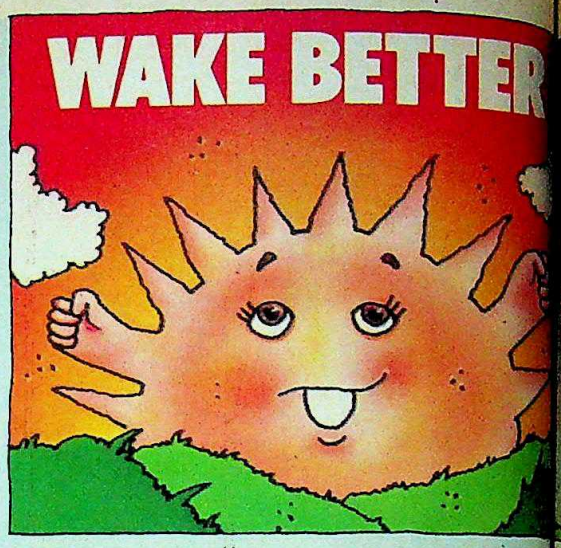

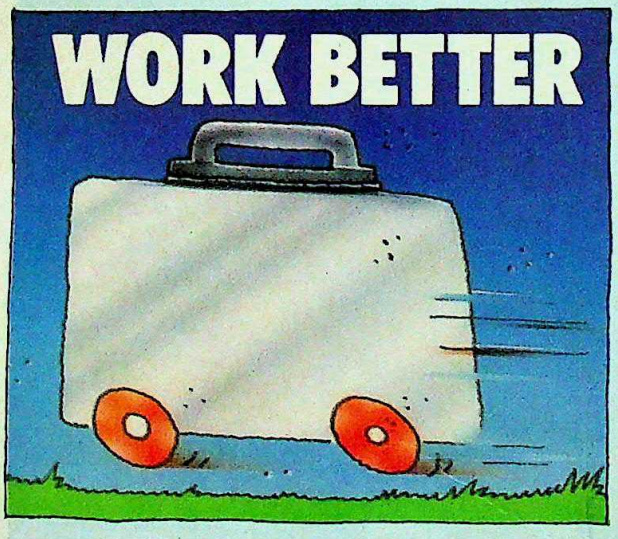

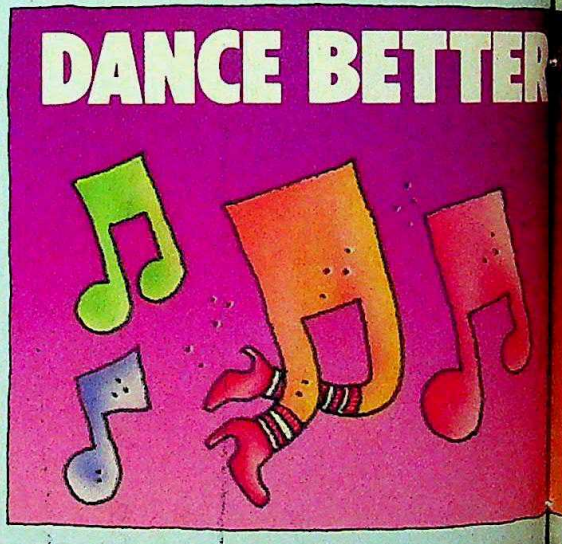

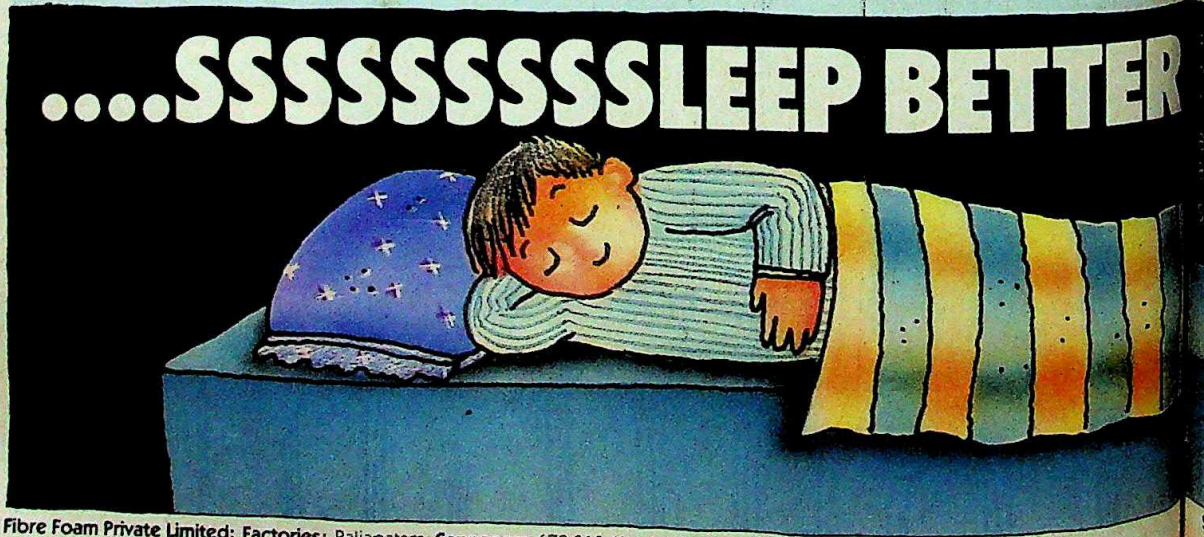

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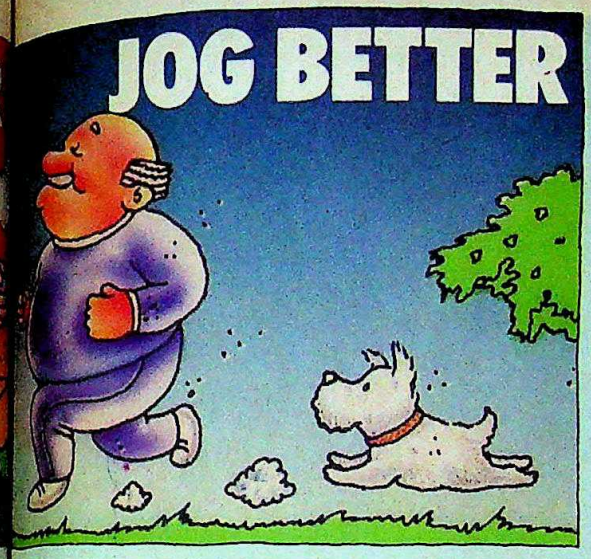

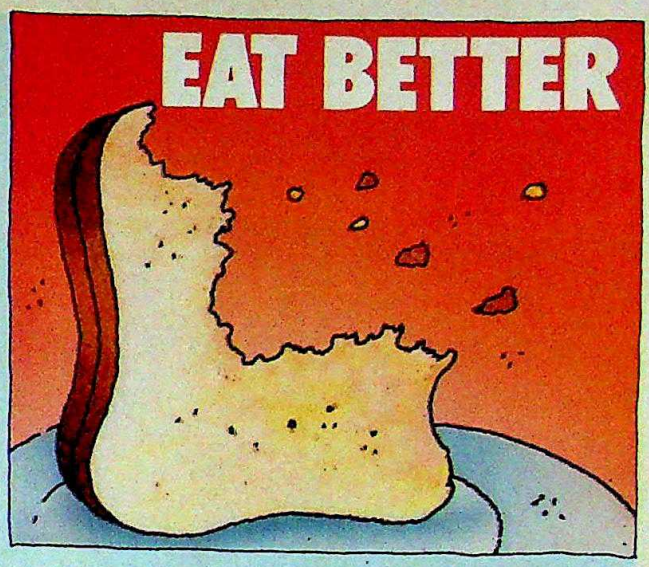

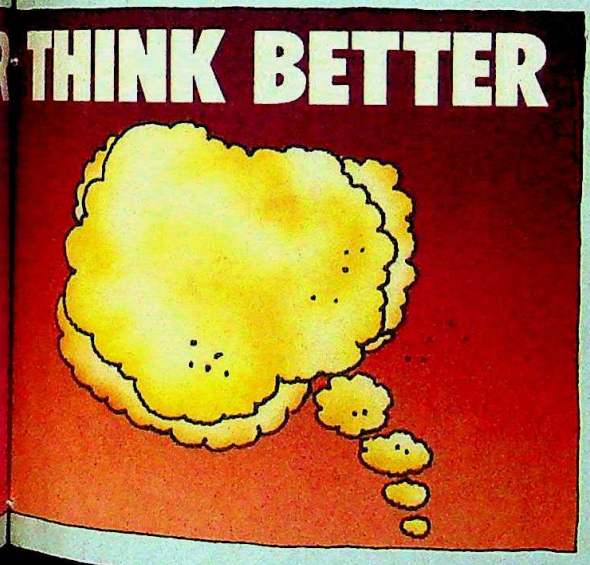

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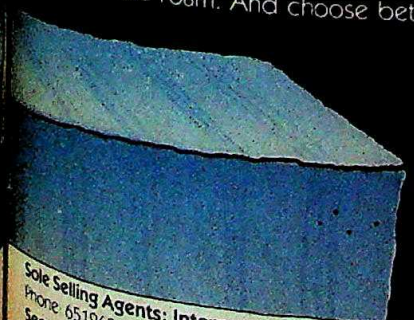

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comes in contact with explosive gases. A cigarette held in front of the beam will light up. "It can burn anything," says Banerji. For instance, if a doctor is firing at a patient and someone put his hand in between, the beam would burn a hole through the hand. Fortunately, as Shroff says, "none of this really happens".

A stone in the kidney can be one of the most excruciating pains known to man. Each time the stone—which is as hard and sometimes, as big as a paperweight—moves, a sharp colicky pain rises in the kidney, unrelieved by anything.

Traditionally, a surgeon would put the patient under anaesthesia, make a 14-inch incision from back to front—the largest incision made in any surgery—and keep him in bed for 10 days. Now there's a technique that quite literally lets you remove your kidney stone in your coffee break.

Known by the tongue-twisting name of extracorporeal shockwave lithotripsy, the therapy is bloodless, non-invasive and relatively painless. One sitting of 40 minutes (cost Rs 10,000 and above) is usually enough to disintegrate the hard stubborn stones into sand-grain-sized particles which then pass out in the urine. "I don't give the patient either anaesthesia or a pain-killer," says Dr Avnish B. Chopra, who has been using the lithotripter since August '87 and does about three treatments every day. "He can simply get up and walk away," he adds.

The patient is strapped onto a bed, his back resting on a water cushion, and

Lithotripsy in progress: future shock

often, soft music is piped in. He must cooperate by not moving. About 10 feet away, the doctor sits before five television monitors: one keeps a check on the heart rate, three register the shockwaves and the fifth shows the patient's face so that at the slightest sign of pain, the doctor can stop.

Once the doctor positions the stone on his monitor, he begins sending 18 to 24 kv shockwaves that hit the patient in flashes of light. He never touches the patient himself. A typical treatment consists of 1000 to 2000 high-pressure shockwaves, all pointed relentlessly at the stone. The thuck, thuck, thuck sound is rather like a hammering or of a man beating a flat-sounding drum. Says Chopra: "After a while it's like a video game. You get the stone on target on a TV monitor and you start shooting."

There is no current or electricity applied—a very common misconception. The energy is entirely generated from hydraulic shockwaves. The lithotripter succeeds in destroying about 98 per cent of all stones placed before it. But the doctor has to be constantly on guard because if he misses the stone, he is bound to put intense pressure on some other part of the body.

Most patients are terribly nervous before they mount the intimidating machine—while leaving though they are rather surprised, unable to believe that the stubborn stones are gone. Said Anuradha Gurtu, 45, a patient: "You can feel the shockwave but it isn't very painful. Getting my tooth extracted hurt more."

Nobody knows why stones form in the kidney, although it certainly has something to do with diet and water—several people once thought it was due to basmati rice. Delhi, Haryana and Punjab are known as the stone belt of India: here two out of every 100 people will carry stones in their bodies. Doctors estimate that there are already 10 million stones in people's kidneys in India—something which can make lithotripsy into a very profitable medical service.

Most people, however, pretend the stone does not exist till it really starts hurting them and doctors have known of victims who have carried stones for five to 10 years before they showed up for treatment. "This has got to be the only country in the world where people have such old stones," says a doctor. In the developed countries, surgery has almost completely been replaced by lithotripsy—the US has 250 lithotripters, Japan 63 while India has only seven, probably because of the extremely high cost (up to Rs 2.24 crore) for the equipment.

While doctors predict that lithotripsy will one day become as popular as ultrasound, there is resistance at the moment. For a start, the cost of treatment is too high and many doctors feel the stones will break and spread all over the system. Consequently, most patients who come for treatment are those who are scared of surgery or have been refused by everyone else either because of renal failure, hypertension, bleeding disorders or their age (lithotripsy can treat anyone from three to 99). The tendency as with anything new is to wait until someone else gets it done first.

The side-effects include gross hematuria (blood in the urine) which is really a good sign, a signal that the treatment was successful; fever and perhaps mild nausea. There is also radiation danger, but this is less than what X-rays in a surgery would add up to. The Dornier lithotripter, for instance, has been FDA (Food and Drug Authority) approved in the US after several years of stringent testing. Still it is a new technique and long term effects, if any, will, as Chopra says, "only appear in the next century".

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA

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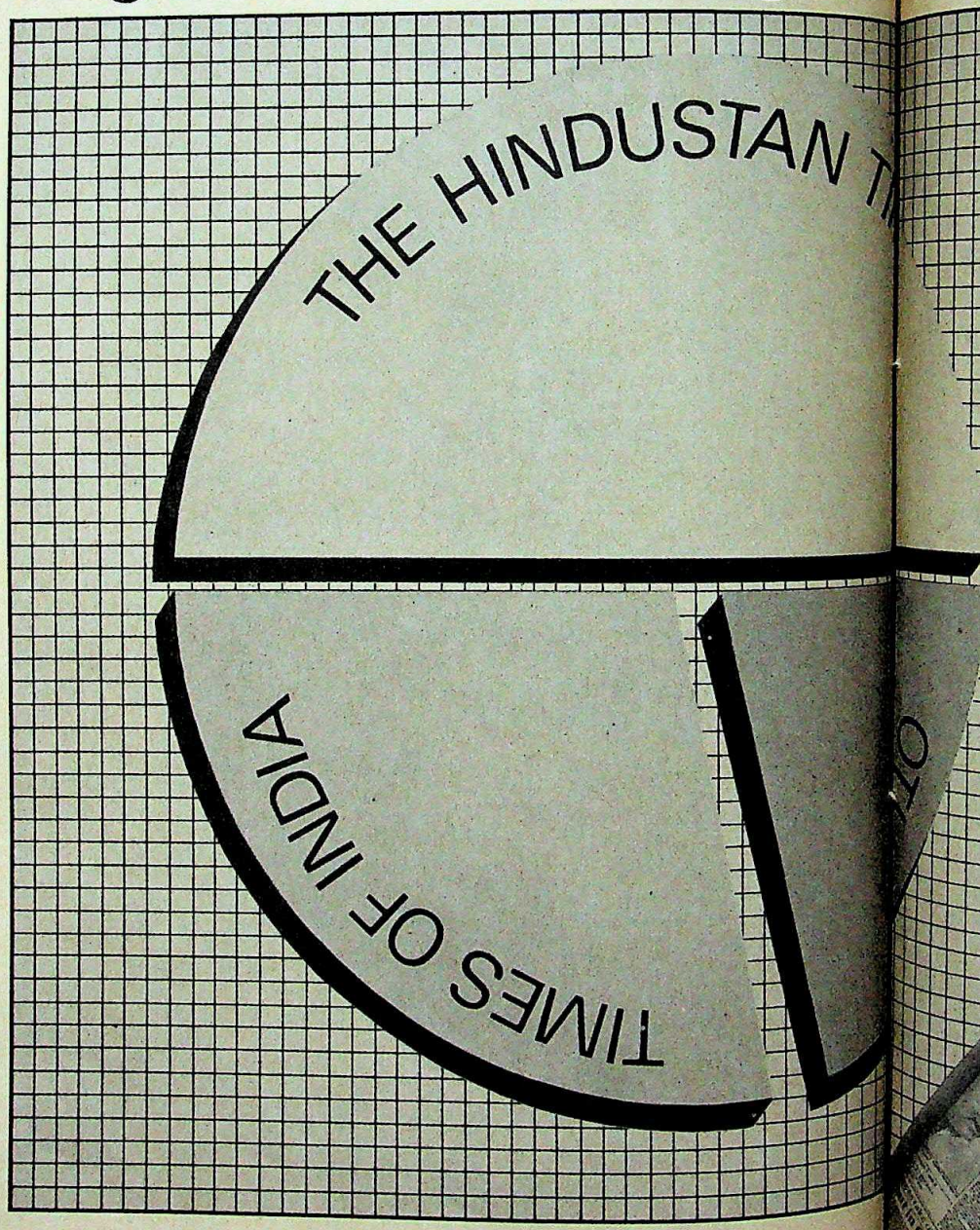
The Hindustan Times is read bore people in Delhi than all ther English dailies put togethe



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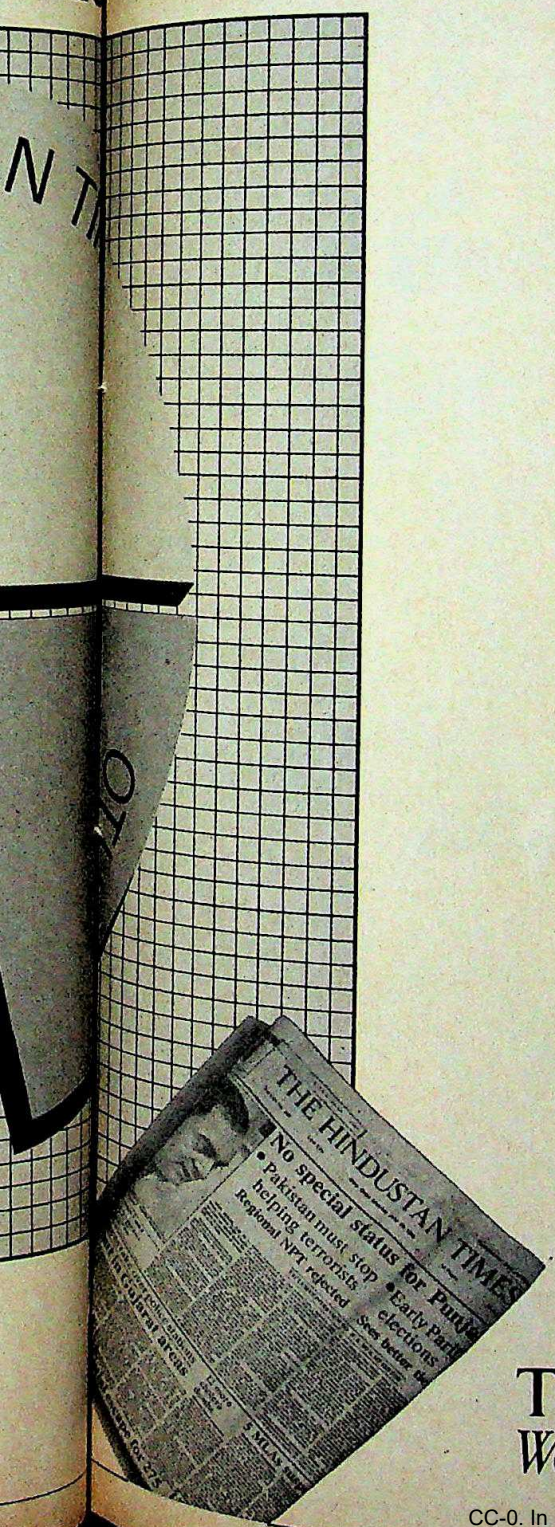

According to the circulation figures certified by Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) —India's only recognized authoritative source of circulation statistics, The Hindustan Times leads the way with over **50%** of the market share.

For the July' 86 to December '86 period, circulation of The Hindustan Times in Delhi city was **1,67,629** copies as compared to **1,67,623** copies* of all the other newspapers combined.

The Hindustan Times is the oldest newspaper in Delhi amongst all the present dailies.

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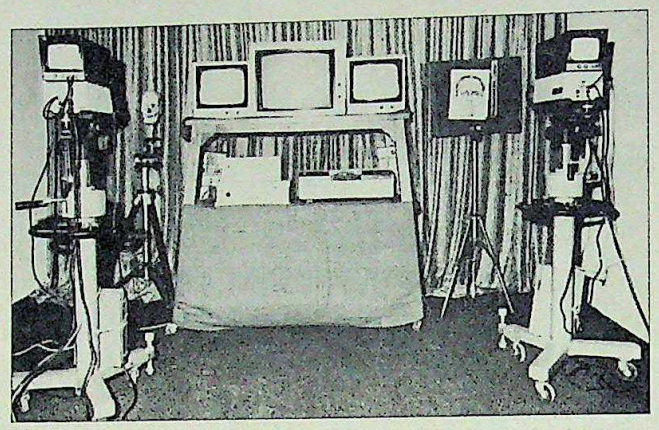
Matching Skills

THE Tamil Nadu Police are proving to be more than a match for T. Gowri Shanker alias 'auto Shanker', accused of multiple murders in Madras. To his dismay, the state police are now using an electronic skull identification device—fabricated by Professor P. Chandra Sekharan, head of the Forensic Science Department—which can match human skulls with photographs and thus identify victims of crime.

The technique is simple. A photograph of the victim is enlarged to life size, taking into account face measurements. From this enlargement, specific factors like flexion, extension and rotation relating to the posture of the face are worked out. The skull is then placed on a special stand capable of permitting all movements of the head.



Skull superimposition at the Forensic Science Department

The photographic images of the skull and face are brought to the same size and superimposed for comparison. To match the facial contours, modelling clay is applied on the skull at certain anthropometric points indicating the thickness of the flesh.

Even if a clear photograph is not available, "it is possible to work out the real life-size face photograph from the clothes, spectacles, even the chair the person is sitting on in the photograph", says Sekharan confidently. And if the picture of the deceased has to be developed from a group photograph, others in the group can be called in to be measured closely. Three of Shanker's six victims are being identified by this method. If it works, more and more of Shanker's ilk may soon be on the run.

Drawing Blood

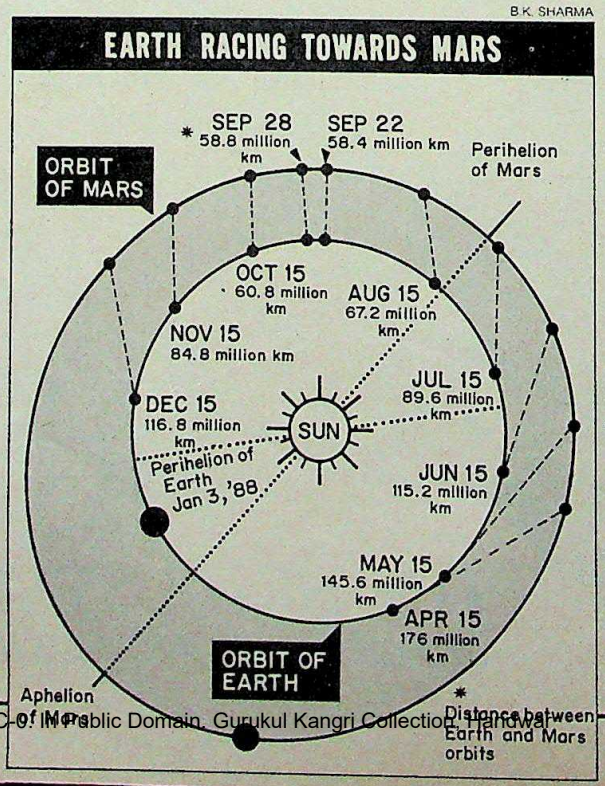
● It's a new approach to extract the maximum benefit from nature without harming it. Scientists at the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa, have developed a technique to draw blood from horseshoe crabs without killing them. About 30 per cent of the blood can be drawn with a needle, after which the crab is returned alive to the sea. Says A. Untawale, head of NIO's Biological Organism Division: "The crab regains the lost blood in a week and can be bled four times a year without harming it." The blood contains a reagent used to detect bacterial poisons in drugs intended for human use. It can also trace bacterial contamination of food stuffs. Given its uses, it's not surprising that scientists have found a way out of killing crabs.

Close Encounters

● On September 22, a red beacon-like object glowed in the eastern sky soon after sunset and was visible through the night. It was the planet Mars, bigger and brighter than usual, as it was at its closest to Earth: only 53,813,880 km away. The orbits of the two planets are elliptical and the distance between them keeps changing. But once every 15 to 17 years, they come as close as they can.

Ever since the red planet was observed during a close encounter in 1877 by Giovanni Schiaperelli, an Italian astronomer, many attempts have been made to detect life on it. Says Dr B.G. Sidarth, director of the Birla Planetarium, Hyderabad: "It's a rare opportunity to get a good look at Mars through a telescope or a pair of binoculars." An opportunity not likely to recur till the next century.

B.K. SHARMA



Substitute Sutures

● There's good news for surgeons. An alternative to importing surgical sutures is in the offing. Scientists at the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT), Cochin, have succeeded in producing collagen filaments—from which the absorbable surgical suture threads are made.

Collagen is found in the connective tissue, bone and cartilage of animals. It's also present in some animals' intestines and the guts of most fish. "Collagen is made by squeezing out the contents of the intestines, washing it, pickling it in chemical solutions and drying it," explains CIFT Director M.R. Nair. Collagen threads, successfully used on guinea-pigs at Bombay's Haffikine Institute, are now being tested on animals at the Haryana Agricultural University. Then they'll be tried out on humans and the economics worked out.

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Should a grown man's clothes just conceal his body or reveal his mind?

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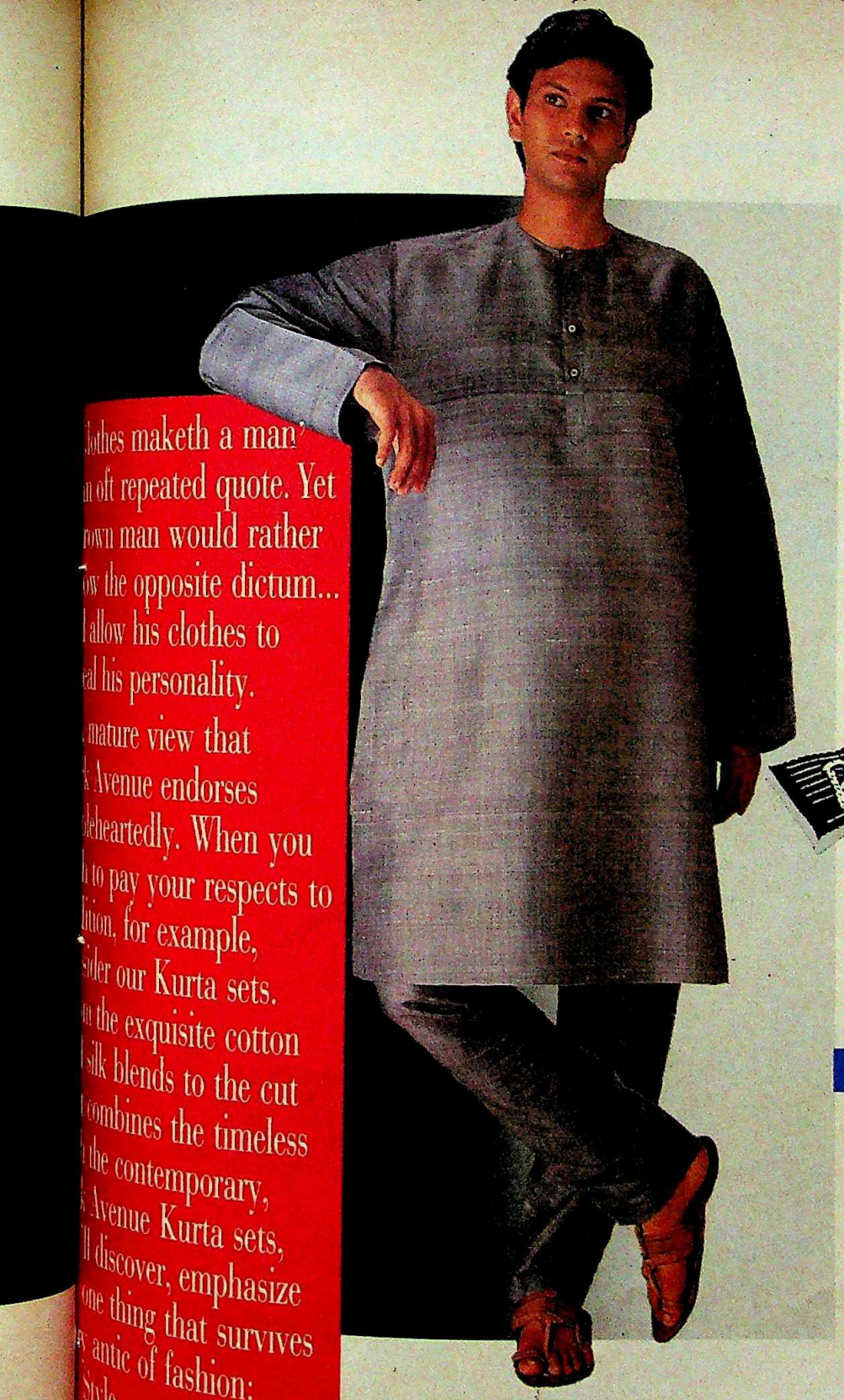

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ASTROTURF

Slippery Surface

Subcontinental hockey suffers

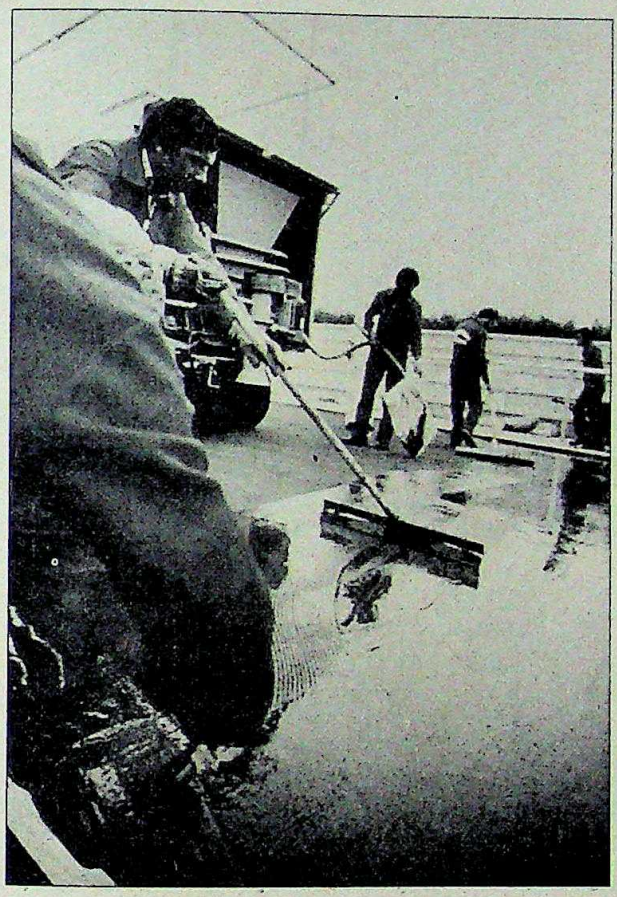
A fortnight after disaster hit them so rudely, hockey pundits in India and Pakistan are busy raising the familiar devil, the astroturf which is widely held responsible for the eclipse of the subcontinent's supremacy in the game. But few know that the hidden causes that made the slide possible in the first place vary from the Korean War and the Hungarian revolt of the '50s to a disillusioned Dutchman, Wim Van Beaumond, and an American scientist Don Spears who could not tell the inside-left from outside-right on a hockey pitch. But between them, they produced the so-called marvel of astroturf which decisively rewrote the power equations in international hockey.

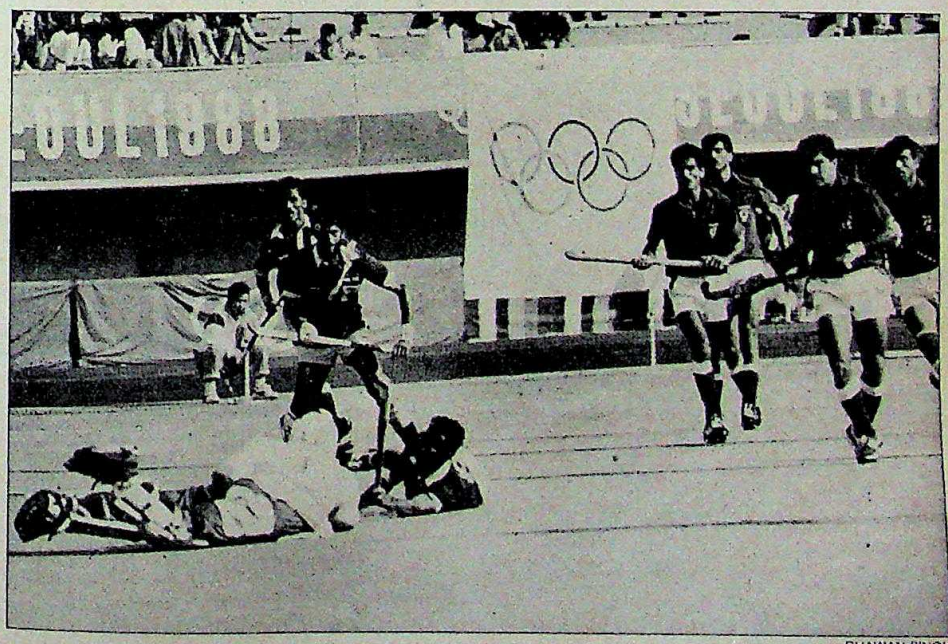
The Pentagon commissioned hundreds of projects to study the lessons of the Korean War. One revealed that the GIs recruited from the country were stronger than those bred in the cities, despite similar levels of nutrition and exercise. The conclusion: village boys got more soft ground and grass to run on while the concrete in the cities placed its own restraints. Immediately, the Pentagon asked Monsanto, the international sports goods giant, and a Ford Foundation laboratory to find an answer to the problem: a grass-like synthetic surface to line the cities' stadia. The first pitch was laid in the Houston baseball astrodome. The revolutionary new surface, fabricated at a pilot plant run by Don Spears, was christened astroturf.

"People laughed at us. They said, at this rate the cows would starve," recalls Ed Milner, who heads the sprawling Astroturf empire headquartered in Dalton, Georgia. But the chuckles stopped as Astroturf began dominating US markets, besides finding an opening in the most unheard-of games.

Milner concedes that in the early '70s hardly anyone in his company knew anything about hockey. When they were approached by the Montreal Olympics organisers, initially they did not know what to say. Montreal has a very short growing season and the organisers thought they would never be able to grow enough grass to sustain a full tournament. Astroturf saw their opportunity and sought help from Beaumond, an exercise physiologist at the University of St Louis. Once selected for the Dutch national hockey team to tour the Soviet Union, Beaumond gave up the game, disillusioned, as the tour was called off to protest the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Now Beaumond, who'd settled in the US, joined Astroturf as a hockey consultant and together they lined the field for the first major hockey tournament at the Montreal Olympics where the highly-fancied world cup holding Indian team finished seventh.

The polypropylene surface shifted the game's gears. The ball moved faster, the spongy surface sapped the





Laying the astroturf (left) and an India-Pakistan tussle on the surface: a set-back

BHAWAN SINGH

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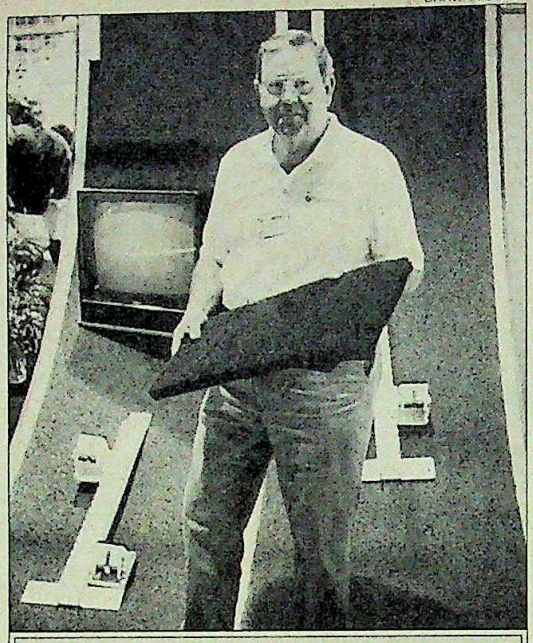
BHAWAN SINGH



players' energy and, as initial calculations showed, the truer nature of the surface cut the penalty corner conversion timing by a tenth of a second. These factors worked against the subcontinental style, as the fitter and bigger European and Australian players ran and, more significantly, lasted longer. "Astroturf was the turning point," says Islahuddin, current Pakistan coach and former star forward, defying any "white man's team to play us on grass". Adds Manzur Ahmed, his deputy and once regarded as the toughest defenders in the game: "Our kids know ball control from the time of birth. The real problem is they can't last long enough on this wretched surface."

As frustrations grew in the subcontinent, Astroturf realised they'd hit a jackpot. European hockey managements discovered the advantages artificial surfaces offered to them and the International Hockey Federation (FIH), which faced the problem of shoring up its resources and making hockey more popular, found a convergence of interest. A system was devised by which the FIH would receive a cut on each artificial surface sold—officially the cut was close to a dollar per square metre. Now, it charges a flat rate of $5,000 (approx: Rs 73,000) per surface that it certifies for sale. Hockey being an amateur sport, the infusion of Astroturf money revived a decrepit FIH which made artificial surfaces mandatory for international tournaments.

> **"What a surface like astroturf does is give speed and fitness a little advantage over experience. But isn't fitness what competitive sport is all about?"**
>
> ED MILNER
> *head of the Astroturf empire*

SINCE then, there have been repeated charges of underhand commissions—though the manufacturers deny these—and even quid pro quos. For example, the blatant partisan umpiring—the Belgian umpire even awarded a penalty stroke against India as defender Ashok Kumar kicked the ball in glee after the closing hooter went off—in the India-Argentina match at Seoul was blamed on Astroturf politics. Indian, Pakistani and Kenyan officials later said openly that the referees had been asked to fix the match as the Argentinians had undertaken to buy a dozen astroturfs if they won and qualified to play in the Champions Trophy.

Non-Asian officials of the FIH deny the charge and point out that they could hardly expect that kind of shopping binge from Argentina which so far has just one worn-out turf, and is in any case strapped for foreign exchange. The official journal of the FIH, distributed during the Olympiad, talked at length about its efforts to popularise the game in non-traditional countries by bringing about changes in the surface and the rules.

To be fair to the FIH, it has succeeded in making the game faster, more result-oriented and attractive. As Milner says: "The first time a game was played on this surface, the number of whistles went down by 32 per cent. A surface like this helps as the ball will do what you want it to do." He argues that the surface hasn't made as much difference to the hockey balance of power as is often believed. "Basically, the human who does the running and falling down is the same. What it does is give speed and fitness a little advantage over experience. But isn't fitness what competitive sport is all about?" he asks. FIH spokesmen also argue that they have only kept pace with trends in the other sports where artificial surfaces have replaced natural grass.

An additional factor in favour of artificial surfaces is the money at stake in current competitive sport and the financial disaster a cancellation due to weather entails. "If there is light enough to see, you can play on these surfaces," says an FIH spokesman, pointing out that the pitches have a system to quickly drain rainwater. FIH studies show that on natural grass hockey can't be played for over 200 hours a year, which means less than a match a day. On synthetic surfaces, matches can be held in a conveyor belt fashion. And, injuries are minimised on a true, spongy surface. But subcontinental hockey experts still don't accept the rationale in support of artificial surfaces at a time when even soccer is reverting to grass. "They've had so many strawberry backsides due to sliding tackles on artificial surfaces that they're returning where they belong," says an Indian team member.

But given the hold astroturf dollars and politics have over international hockey, an about turn is most unlikely. Thus, nations like India and Pakistan who lay such store by their hockey prowess, have to accept the long-term reality. Notes Indian coach M.P. Ganesh: "They play on these surfaces from the age of eight. We get our first taste of it at 20, in top class hockey." Adds Brigadier Atif, Pakistani hockey chief and FIH vice-president: "India and Pakistan together don't have a dozen turfs. Holland has 300."

Atif says the subcontinent's supremacy can only be restored if India installed "60-70 and Pakistan 30-40" such surfaces, even at the current cost of nearly $450,000 (approx: Rs 65 lakh) per pitch. "If our nations can afford to maintain two of the most expensive armies in the world, we could surely afford the turf," he argues. Atif speaks with the rare conviction of a former Pakistan captain who saw his side lose the gold to India in Tokyo and later clung to hockey as his life's main driving force after months in an Indian prisoner of war camp after 1972. It isn't surprising that it's his formula that offers the best choice: a jointly-planned investment cum effort by both India and Pakistan to regain glory in the only sport in which the subcontinent had once dominated the world.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA in Seoul

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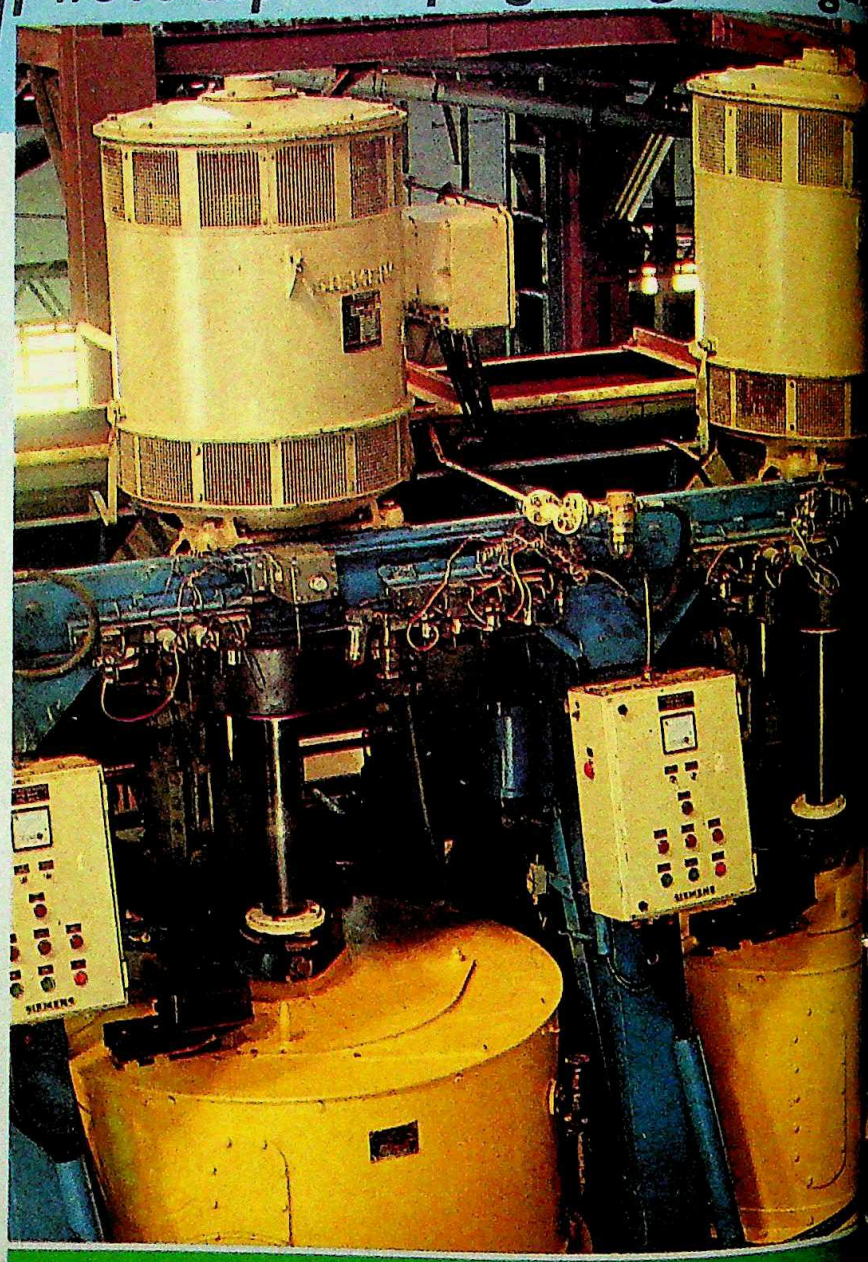

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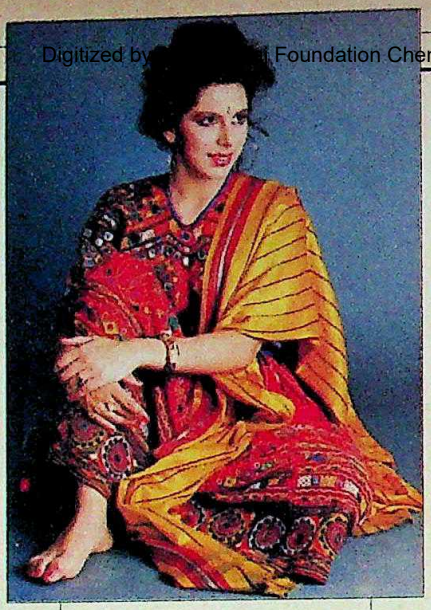
Pooja Bedi: stunt girl

◆ Like mother like daughter. Ever since she got back from Los Angeles, **Pooja Bedi**, the glamorous daughter of Protima and Kabir Bedi has been painting Bombay red—with her umpteen *affaires de coeur*. Now the vivacious 18-year-old is making news with her first film, *Vish Kanya*—a tale of revenge in which the pretty young thing will physically take on the villain. So she's started lessons in horse-riding and stunts. "I want to be a complete actress—polished and well-prepared before taking the plunge," says she. A surprise role indeed for the would-be stockbroker, had mommy had her way.



◆ Saying it with a skip. That's what **Paramjit Singh Nandhra** believes in. The enthusiastic estate agent skips 2,000 times a day in parks and sundry public places all over London. His target: one million skips and £1 million—for the children of Ethiopia.

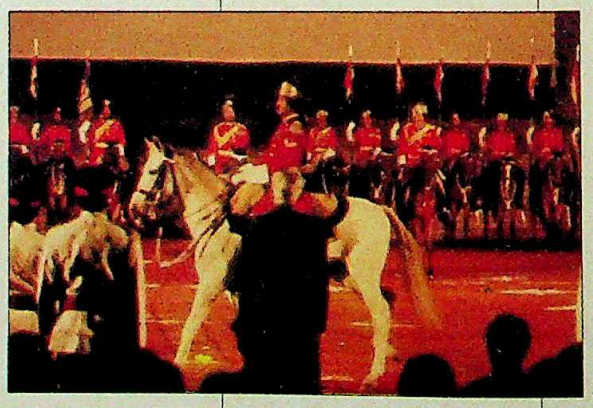
"I'm bang on target," says he. At least as far as skipping goes. His 'Skipping Mr Sikh' bank account has drawn a blank so far. He's not given up hope however and is flying to India in December. He'll do his routine 2,000 skips before boarding his flight, then some more during the stopover at Frankfurt, and finally, at Delhi airport. That makes him India's Skipping and Flying Sikh rolled into one!

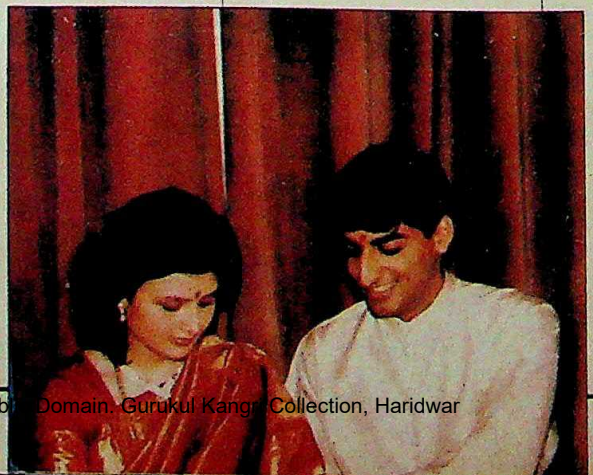
Nandhra: skipping spree

P.S. NANDHRA

◆ It was like a day out of the British Raj. A black buggy drawn by two horses; the head of state seated in it. Then, a snow-white charger with a 6-ft-tall officer astride cantered up to him while an elite cavalry corp—in ceremonial red and blue looked on. It was the 215th birth anniversary of the **President's Bodyguard**. At Rashtrapati Bhavan, President R. Venkataraman presented a silver trumpet and banner—maroon-and-gold, with RV embroidered on it—to them. Then the Bodyguard took over, performing a string of daring stunts—like horse-jumping through fire loops—to perfection. An evening Warren Hastings, who raised the regiment, would be proud of.

The President's Bodyguard





◆ A former Olympian and a lecturer in maths? No wonder **Ranjit Bhatia** could figure not only the country that would win at Seoul but also its exact medal tally: 132 to the dot. At the Adidas' Journalist Tip Contest, Bhatia and West German Carsten Vick were declared winners. Now Bhatia, a sports columnist, will wing his way to his $1,200 dream holiday, courtesy Lufthansa. "I thought it was just a good joke," he laughs. But how the bull's eye? "It was an off-the-cuff figure decided over dinner."

Ranjit Bhatia: bull's eye

◆ The shipping tycoon's son has found his mate. Last fortnight, Vikram and **Radhika** made waves when they tied the knot. It was, after all, an alliance between the two most-talked of Kashmiri families: Ravi Tikkoo's and Arun Nehru's. A very, very, traditional five-day-affair, there were singers from the valley, Kashmiri bigwigs like Vijaylaxmi Pandit, a *Phool-lon ka gahena* ceremony in which Radhika was bedecked with flowers, Sanjay the starry-eyed bride. "I'm waiting for it all to sink in." Then it's off to the US, where Vikram runs dad's business.

Radhika and Vikram

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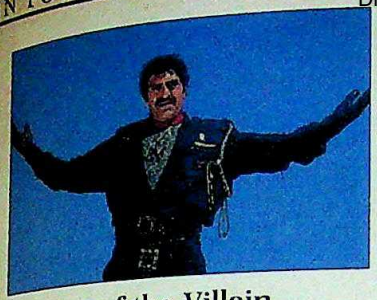
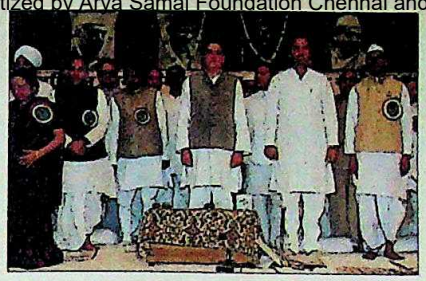


The Day of the Villain

The villain in Indian cinema never had it so good. As the difference between good and evil blurs, the princes of darkness—more in number and better paid than before—have become the new trend-setters, stealing the limelight from the heroes.

COVER STORY 148



Mounting Aggression

Even as there are growing speculations of a mid-term poll, there are signs that any ensuing battle between the Congress(I) and the Opposition will be a fierce one. And with the ruling party beginning to present a more aggressive face, gross populism fills the air.

SPECIAL REPORTS 26

A Turning Point

The general elections in Pakistan mark a watershed in the nation's history. But once the euphoria over the return to democracy is over, the problems will surface. The new government will have the unenviable task of tackling them head-on.

SPECIAL REPORTS 36

A Close Shave

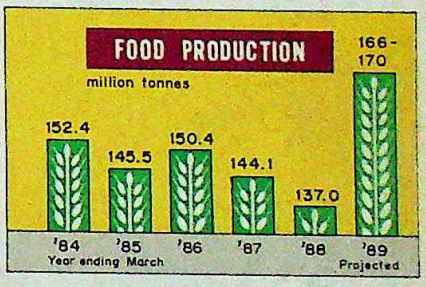
Last week's abortive, comic-book coup attempt brought international spotlight on the obscure, but exotic, coral island nation of Maldives. It also gave India an opportunity to reassert its status as a regional power by rushing in troops to save the vulnerable nation.

SPECIAL REPORTS 44

Mandate for Continuity

George Bush outlasted Michael Dukakis to emerge the 41st President of the US as opinion polls had predicted. But far from being euphoric, the general mood of the nation seems listless and the challenges confronting Bush remain grim. A report.

GLOBE-TROTTING 90



Looking Good...but

The signs of an economic boom are visible as there is good news from both the agricultural and the industrial front. But deep-rooted problems like the domestic and foreign debt burden, inflation and the trade deficit persist. An in-depth analysis.

BUSINESS 102

CONTENTS

COMMENT 11
CAPITALOOK 14
VOICES 19
INDIANOTES 20
THE FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 25
SPECIAL REPORTS
National Politics: Mounting Aggression ..26
Tamil Nadu: Changed Fortunes 30
Pakistan: A Turning Point 36
Maldives: A Close Shave 44
Communalism: Stirring the Cauldron 50
CURRENT EVENTS
Nehru Centenary: Sacrificial Sackings 54
Punjab: Deadly Spurt 56
The CPI: An Overdue Overhaul 57
West Bengal: Bitter Win 58
Andhra Pradesh: Road Shock 63
Bihar: Striking Out 66
Bottomline: Baring the Assets 74
STATENOTES 79
THE INTERVIEW OF THE FORTNIGHT
Farooq Abdullah:
"There's a limit to what I can take" ... 85
GLOBE-TROTTING
US Elections: Mandate for Continuity 90
TRADE WINDS 101
BUSINESS
The Economy: Looking Good...but 102
Environmental Clearances:
Development Dilemma 107
The Modis: The Fissures Widen 113
Garments: The Big Rush 119
BCCL: A Sham Job 122
Executive Lifestyle: Oh Calcutta! 130
The Markets: Bullish Again 137
THE ECONOMY MONITOR 141
THE ARTS
Zubin Mehta:
The End of the Honeymoon 144
COVER STORY
Cinema: The Day of the Villain 148
MEDIAWATCH 163
BOOKS
Political Nostalgia 164
SPORTS
Cricket: Familiar Fissures 167
Mountaineering:
Himalayan Blunders 173
Bridge: Bridging the Gap 179
LIVING
Arunachal Pradesh:
The Influence of Spirits 180
The Handicapped:
Getting their Due 187
EYE-CATCHERS 192

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TRAGIC REMINDERS

It may be sheer coincidence that O.M. Dalaya, whose report of pre-flight test in 1983 was published, was the same pilot who met his end on the day of the Ahmedabad disaster (" How Safe?", November 15). While it does not necessarily imply that want of proper pre-flight test resulted in the unfortunate episode, I hope it helps to open the eyes of the intransigent powers that be.

New Delhi — **K.V. SUBRAMANIAN**

■ The tragic loss of life as a result of the two air accidents will no doubt prompt the authorities to carry out probes. Whatever the outcome of the inquiry, the maxim "it is the man behind the machine which matters" should never be forgotten. It is unfortunate that in the recent past both Air-India and Indian Airlines have done a major shift in their recruitment policy. Earlier, the majority of pilots in the two airlines were seconded from the Indian Air Force with thousands of hours of flying experience behind them. Now all three airlines resort to direct recruitment of pilots through the recently-opened Indira Gandhi Flying Academy at Rae Bareli. By all means train youngsters in flying but it is criminal to entrust the lives of passengers to these inexperienced pilots.

New Delhi — **N. SNEH**

AMAZING COINCIDENCE

It is indeed a coincidence that the article ("Endless Delays, Sloppy Service", October 31) appeared just before Indian Airlines' guardian angel stopped working overtime, resulting in the Boeing crash at Ahmedabad. The greater coincidence is that the pre-flight medical examination report you published to highlight the superficial nature of such tests happens to be that of Captain O.M. Dalaya—who was the commander of the 737 which crashed in Ahmedabad.

Calcutta — **PRAN SATHIADASAN**

ALARMING SCENARIO

I found it rather distressing to discover that in a country with such a large number of illiterates, unemployed and homeless, I happen to be only one individual out of 800 million ("The Great Hoax", October 31). But seriously, the main cause of this situation, especially in the rural areas, is the conservatism of our society as opposed to western society which is extremely liberal. This is why our problem is control of population, while theirs is the control of AIDS.

Bhubaneswar — **AHALYA HEJMADI**

■ So, if 70,000 are born every day in India, it is because of the bungling of the Government. Why not add that it is also because of the bungling of the press which is ever anxious to expose the dangers from politicians but not those stemming from population explosion? Recently, we saw a woman from a slum complaining on TV: *"Peene ko pani nahi. Khane ko kuchch nahi. Karne ko koi kaam nahi milta. Mai aur mere chhe bachche kaise jiyenge?"* (There is no drinking water, nothing to eat and no means of livelihood. How will I and my six children survive?). This sums up the situation.

Visakhapatnam — **N. ANANDA RAO**

■ The Government's scheme of luring the public into family planning operations has led to a total misinterpretation of the programme. Villagers believe that family planning is solely beneficial to the Government and by undergoing an operation they are actually doing the state a favour. Hence their demand for plots of land and sewing-machines in return for an operation, all of which has converted the scheme into a mere business.

Lucknow — **MEERA MISHRA**

■ The self-deception will go on till such time as the so-called socially and economically backward classes have incentives by way of education, employment and housing. Again, the self-deception will continue as long as the minority under the garb of religion are encouraged to procreate. It is the best of both worlds for such people—a personal law which governs their private life and the Indian Penal Code which governs their public life.

Cachar, Assam — **ASHOK TRIVEDI**

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INEVITABLE EFFECT

With regard to your article ("Political Scapegoat", October 31), Salman Rushdie should appreciate the fact that in a country where the literacy rate is low and communal passions are high, it is inevitable that a book like *The Satanic Verses* will offend the religious sentiments of many people.

Deoria — PREM SHANKAR PANDEY

■ Shahabuddin and Khurshid Alam Khan have every right to express their indignation if they feel that Salman Rushdie has vilified their religion. But they shouldn't be telling us what to read and how. India is a democracy and voices of dissent and debate must be heard. Riots are started by politicians and their gullible followers, certainly not by books. Banning *The Satanic Verses* is rather like prescribing Waterburys' compound for a victim of AIDS. It is quite in line, though, with the actions of a government that thought up the Defamation Bill.

Shillong — PRASANTA K. DAS

MORE PRIME MINISTER

Doordarshan having long ago discarded its facade of a medium for education and information, such multi-crore extravagances ("The Art of the State", October 31) to provide more sophisticated entertainment come as no surprise. We shall now eagerly wait to see the prime ministerial eyes roll vertically, horizontally and axially and his full form electronically zoom-compress to a dot and vanish.

Neyveli, Tamil Nadu — R. MATHUR

NOT THE ANSWER

The Narmada Valley project ("A Flood of Controversies", October 31) is the outcome of urban thinking. The tragedy is that there is no room for rural thinking in the affairs of our nation. The latter is full of sagacity and wisdom—man is not apart from nature but is a single species with the entire fauna and flora. Such major irrigation projects are certainly not the answer to the nation's many problems.

Medak, Andhra Pradesh — Y. HANMANTH RAO

BEING SHUT OUT

I felt very homesick after I read the article ("Under the Gun" October 15). Though Burmese, I am a naturalised Indian and have been living in this country since the mid-'60s. I made applications twice for re-entry visas to Burma. It was quite a job, but I got no response. In December 1980, Colonel Myo Khin, military attache, Burmese Embassy, New Delhi, and his pilgrim party were stranded here for want of diesel. I helped him out and he promised to help, but couldn't. I was told that there was an unwritten law that people like me, even when their mothers were dying couldn't gain entry, while General Ne Win brought his bride from abroad.

Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh — SAW K. NYUNT

LACK OF INCENTIVES

With reference to your article "(Wired for Trouble", October 31) about the shortfall of quality teachers, I think the Government is to blame for not making the M.Tech and ME post-graduate courses attractive enough as compared to industry. The M. Tech and ME students get a meagre scholarship of Rs 1,000 a month which is nothing compared to the salary packages offered by industry to the brightest graduates. Hence the cream of the graduates don't feel compelled to join these post-graduate courses (even those offered by the IITs). The inevitable result is that they continue to be lost to research and teaching jobs in the country.

IIT, Madras — AJAY KUMAR

NOT IMPRESSED

We are students of class XII of Loyola Hall, Ahmedabad, and were surprised to find an article highlighting the "growing obsession for looking good" among the very insignificant minority of teenagers in public schools of New Delhi and Bombay ("Colour in the Classrooms", October 31). We were also shocked to read the statement of the head mistress of New Delhi's Modern School about how "each one looks good now" as against 20 years ago "when they all looked awful"—an adjective we don't expect a head mistress to use to describe her students. Here in Ahmedabad, which is more fashion-conscious than most other cities, the more sensible students equate this craze with 'Sethia' culture and disinterest in studies. In our opinion, the real "go-getters" are those who work to build self-confidence and not a *nakli* confidence which is only clothes-deep.

Ahmedabad — CHIRADEEP RAO AND MADHUSUDHAN MUKHERJEE

ONE-SIDED REPORT

Your article ("The Call of Duty", October 31) contains factual inaccuracies and gives a wholly one-sided picture with the sole objective of showing GTC Industries in bad light.

The article says "the 265-crore cigarette manufacturer and some of its suppliers are accused of having evaded excise duty totalling about Rs 200 crore". Thus the manufacturer's liabilities have been clubbed with those of the suppliers, a procedure unknown to law. Till now GTC has not received any communication about its statement of income having been challenged and this also shows the slant of the story. A reference has also been made to the case of Ramesh Bhattacharjee, additional collector of customs and excise. GTC is not connected with the several criminal and contempt cases pending against him.

The article seems to imply that the transfer of excise cases from the states to Delhi suggests something sinister. Probably you are unaware that similar action has been taken by the excise authorities in the cases against ITC and National Tobacco Company. All along GTC Industries have fought for a fair trial where its right to cross examine evidence is granted. A recent Delhi High Court order on October 3 upholds this right. It is well-known that such cases carry on in courts for many years and GTC's case is no exception. The article seems to suggest that GTC should not exercise the legal options available to it.

New Delhi — E.N. GADRE
general manager (media relations)
Dalmia Bros. Pvt Ltd

The article is based on show cause notices served to the company. The Government claims that because there is a 'special relationship' between GTC and the suppliers, the notices have been served to both. Our correspondent made several efforts to obtain the viewpoint of the company. But the chairman, who made a few comments on the telephone, which have been published, refused to grant an interview. —Editor

NOT VERY BRAVE

First sati and now female infanticide ("A Murderous Tradition", October 31). If the only way the Rajput men can defend their honour and exhibit their bravery is by killing women and children, I suggest that these men add bangles to their standard dress.

Halifax, UK — NARENDRA KUMAR JAIN

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— M.A.K. PATAUDI

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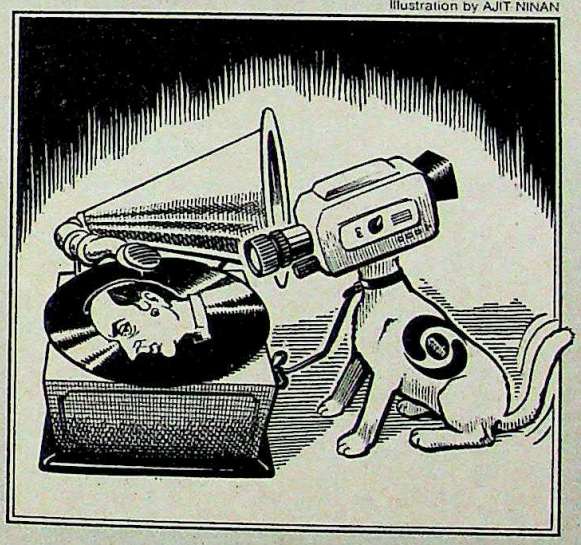
Denying a Public Right

DURING his 1984 visit to Washington D.C. Rajiv Gandhi responded to a question about when All India Radio and Doordarshan would be made autonomous, by saying that the people of India were "not ready for it", at the moment.

Not ready for it. This was typically the response of the British patriarchs and racists to demands from liberals for India's Independence. How Jawaharlal Nehru, whose birth centenary the nation is celebrating must turn in his grave to see his grandson and the party he so loved make a mockery of the principles he cherished. One he loved dearly was the right of the people—be they "ready for it" or not—to unfettered information and access to divergent points of view. Diversity, he always maintained, was the fuel of freedom.

In fact, Nehru's first public speech in 1916 was a diatribe against the Press Act under which the Government could enslave or close down a newspaper by demanding—at will—huge amounts of monetary security. Nehru said in Jeffersonian fashion: "I would rather have a completely free press with all the dangers involved in the wrong use of that freedom than a suppressed or regulated press."

Illustration by AJIT NINAN



And during Nehru's birth centenary, Rajiv Gandhi gave us the Defamation Bill. Nehru would turn in his grave, too, at the way the official media has brutalised the concept of diversity and access even in depicting the memory of his slain daughter. That too, has become a media event. A Doordarshan event with all its Goebbelsian accoutrements.

The television screen, as it were, has been turned into a political family album for Rajiv and the Congress party. And never has the use of state television been as abusive of the public's right to free and fair information as before, during, and after the October 31 rally in New Delhi attended by lakhs of specially transported people from all over the country to commemorate Mrs Gandhi's fourth death anniversary.

What was the need for it? It wasn't commemorated last year. Grief for Indira Gandhi and her memory is a private affair, a matter of the heart, not of public posturing and grandiloquent rhetoric. And that memory is not the political preserve of the Congress party. Yet, Congress MLAs and party functionaries and ministers commandeered public transport to ship people to Delhi, tying up the roads and the rails and virtually bringing the city to a halt. In sharp contrast, the kisan rally next door was demanding fair prices and a greater share in power. The kisans asked for bread. The ruling Congress party gave them a massive circus, instead.

And the circus was what you saw on television. Almost 25 minutes of it on the nightly Doordarshan news. The only mention of the kisan rally was that Mahendra Singh Tikait was satisfied with his talks with Rajesh Pilot. A lie, it turned out. Tikait was later to say. Doordarshan didn't carry this, of course, that his talks had not been fruitful. And Doordarshan commemorated the demise of Mrs Gandhi by showing a petulant Rajiv Gandhi virtually describing the Opposition as traitorous. Of course, there was no chance for an opposition rebuttal. This was clearly the most monstrous use of television for political purposes.

The previous night was devoted to Doordarshan cameras panning a huge effigy-like statue of Mrs Gandhi, the cameras stopping incongruously at midriff. There were shots also, of Sikh priests in some gurdwara singing the Gurbani with a portrait of Mrs Gandhi in front. On the day of the rally, the 'news' of the rally was followed by Rajiv Gandhi dressed as a boy scout talking to boy scouts. Another five minutes. Towards the end were shots of Rajiv Gandhi and family at Mrs Gandhi's samadhi.

And there was more to come. Immediately following was an hour-long programme on Mrs Gandhi which was an outright political projection of the Congress party. What was shocking was that President Venkataraman made an appearance on that programme at least four times, making comments on various topics including the Punjab situation. He called her "the most fearless person" who even turned down his offer, when he was defence minister, to replace her civilian security with military security. He described her most solid foreign policy achievement as her success in persuading Margaret Thatcher to support a system of sanctions against South Africa.

The Gandhis just never seemed to get off the screen. There followed more pictures about the rally. Rajiv and Sonia watching the sun rise at Shakti Sthal. Rahul and Priyanka watching Malikarjun Mansoor rendering *Jogi mat ja* in Bhairavi. Cut to Rajiv at Congress rally excoriating the Opposition.

But enough said. There should be no "debate" as the ruling party would have it, over the role of Doordarshan just as there is no room for debate over free speech. There should simply be unrelenting demands for autonomy. The reality is that the airwaves are a public resource. They belong to the public. They cannot be allowed to remain the monopoly of politicians, prime ministers and pliant bureaucrats. When the British said "they are not ready for it", Tilak responded: "Freedom is my birthright and I shall have it." When Rajiv repeats the British line in connection with Doordarshan, the only fitting answer he can be given in Tilak's vein is that public access to unfettered and diverse views over the airwaves is a fundamental right whose time has come.

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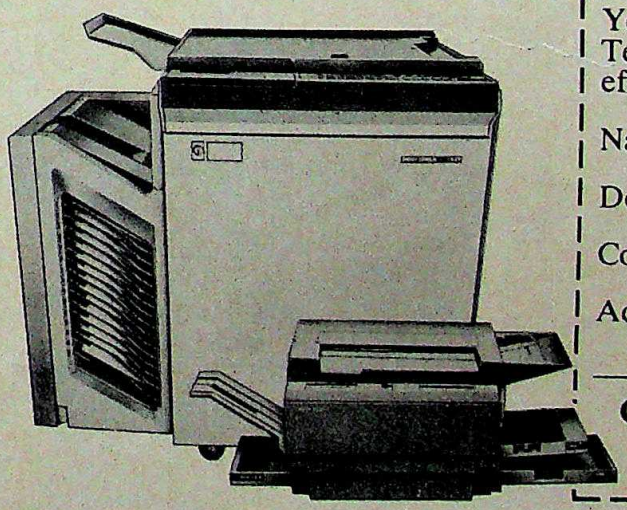

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The Hidden Sources

● One of the biggest embarrassments suffered by the late prime minister Mrs Gandhi followed a speech she delivered at the United Nations. It was discovered that entire tracts contained in the speech—thought to be original—were plagiarised from the works of Dr Mahboob-ul-Haq, the Pakistan finance minister who was then posted to the World Bank. The results of the witch-hunt into who committed the gaffe were never made public.

And now Rajiv Gandhi may land in a similar soup if his filters are not alert enough. Ever the systems man, as election fever catches, Rajiv has entrusted the preparation of speech materials to dozens of people. And those given the task are not always the prime minister's eggheads—Mani Shankar Aiyar, Gopi Arora, G. Parathasarathy. A bevy of

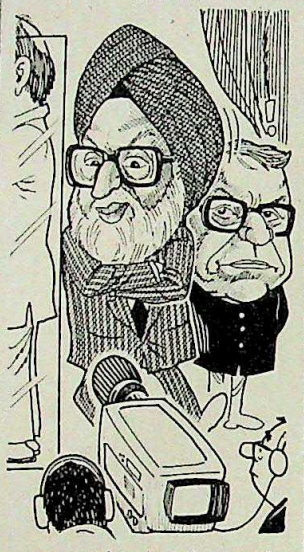
party functionaries as well as members of Parliament will also have a hand in writing the premier's speeches.

Not all are, to say the least, well-read. And the dangers of involving them came to light last fortnight when one of Rajiv's aides discovered that two position papers on electoral reforms were lifted from existing sources—one from an academic text, and the other, more embarrassingly, from opposition stalwart L.K. Advani.

Displeasing Tactic

● Punjab's dapper and energetic Additional Chief Secretary, Manohar Singh Gill—

Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



was considered a shoo-in for the post of chief secretary, from which incumbent R.P. Ojha is expected to retire shortly, as he was the blue-eyed boy of Governor S.S. Ray.

But not any longer. Things changed drastically for Gill following Rajiv Gandhi's highly publicised visit to the state. During the TV coverage of the visit, Gill beat Ray to the prime minister's side behind the bullet-proof glass, hour after hour. And Ray is not used to being upstaged, especially by lesser civil servants.

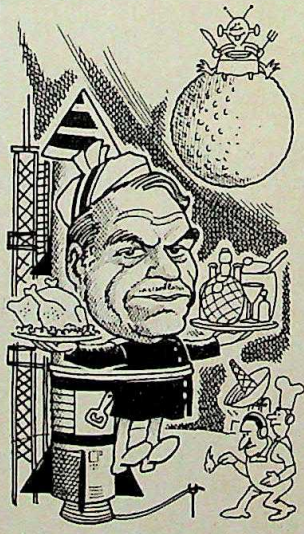
Gill also created problems for himself when at a press conference he dittoed Union Agriculture Minister Bhajan Lal's claim that only minor damage had been done to the state by recent floods (estimates put the damage at 60 per cent). Both Bhajan Lal's and Gill's statements outraged Punjabi farmers, especially the Jat Sikhs. In a press conference of his own, Ray retorted that he did not have to accept the views of the additional chief secretary.

Why did Gill risk angering both Ray and the Jat Sikhs—whose champion he always professed to be—by repeating Bhajan Lal's gaffe? Insiders say that Gill had sensed Ray's displeasure with him for some time now. And if posted out of Punjab, Gill was expected to come to the Centre as agriculture secretary—under Bhajan Lal. He has come to the Centre all right, but as secretary for petrochemicals.

Unearthly Realism

● Shivraj Patil, the amiable minister for tourism and civil aviation is either a star-gazer or spaced out or both. At least he seemed to be last month at a gathering of top hoteliers in the nation's capital.

The minister was holding forth on the challenges faced by what he described as the "hospitality industry". The industry he said, "is going to



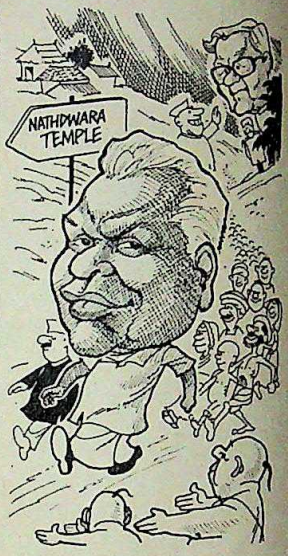
face greater challenges in the next century." So far so good. Safe and soporific. But then he said something which surely must have woken up the man in the moon.

"It is not a fantasy," intoned Patil, "that man will live in space and outer space in the near future...this may not be very pragmatic. But I have a feeling that in the future...this kind of hospitality will be required in other planets and outer space also."

Talk about flights of fancy.

The Feud Thrives

● Though belonging to the same party, President R. Venkataraman and former Con-



gress(I) general secretary G.K. Moopanar have been rivals for 20 years, exemplifying Tamil Nadu's Brahmin-backward class feud. And despite Venkataraman now holding the highest office in the land, the feud continues.

Last fortnight, Moopanar announced that he—along with others—had been chosen to lead Harijans into Rajasthan's Nathdwara temple. The question that immediately arose—why Moopanar in Rajasthan?

Congress(I) sources provided some clues. It turns out that when the controversy over Harijans entering the temple was at its height, Venkataraman publicly offered to lead them in. This embarrassed Congressmen, as none of them had yet spoken on behalf of the Harijans.

So now, the party's dirty tricksters decided to hit back. And how better than to choose Venkataraman's political foe for a job which he had volunteered to do.

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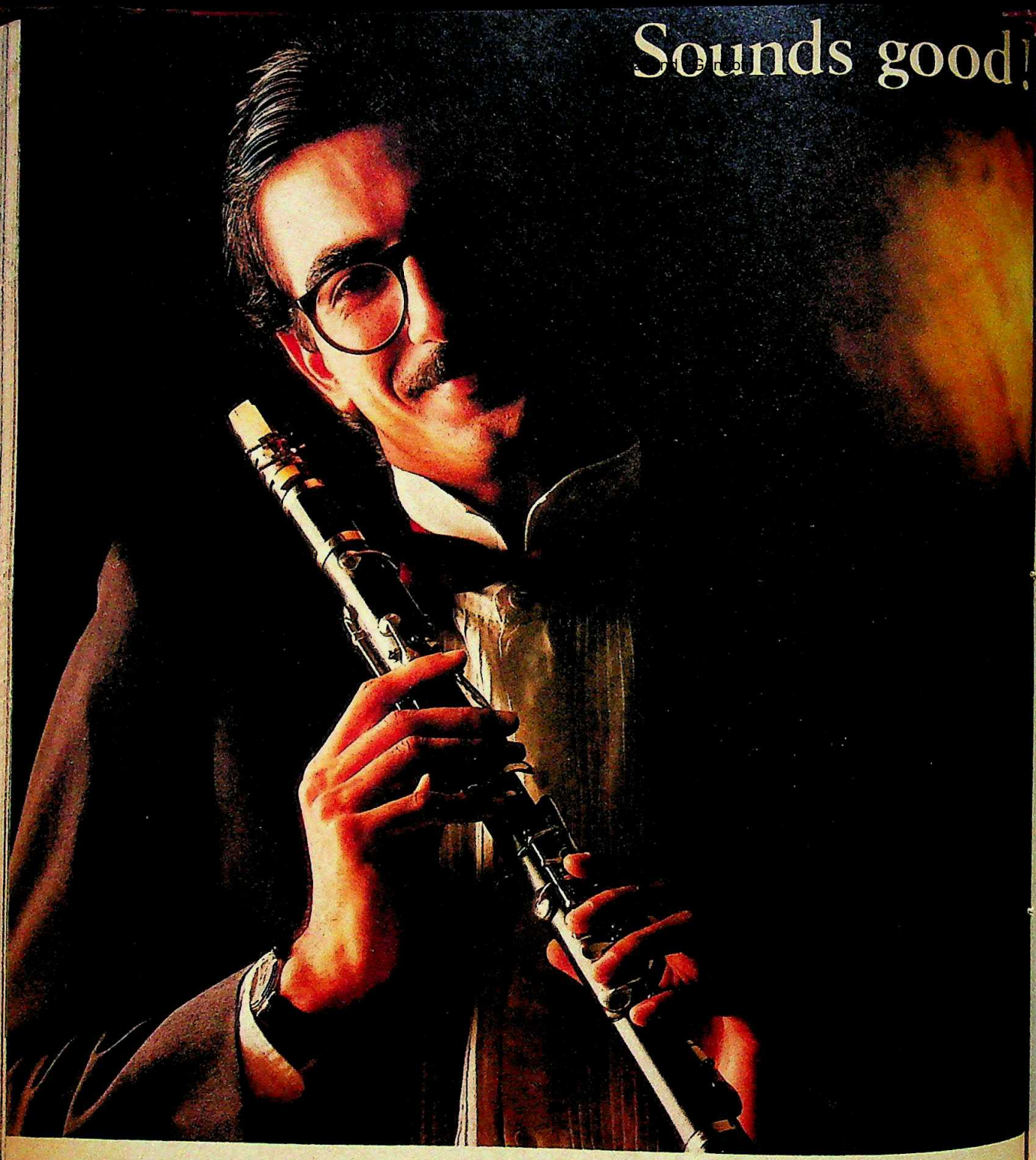

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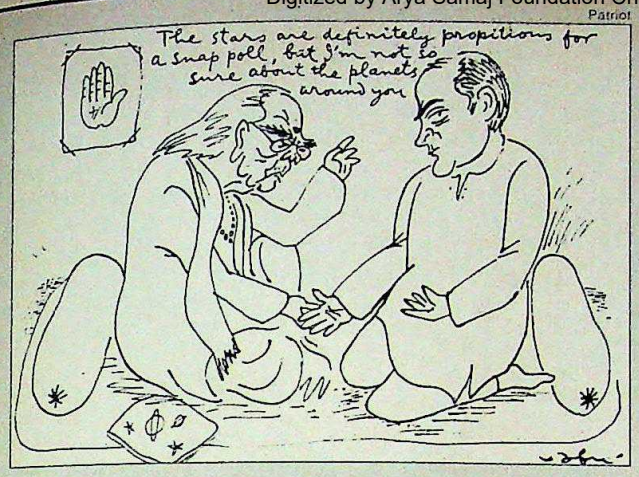

• *The Opposition is a platform made of different planks with no nails to hold them together.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI addressing a public meeting on National Integration Day

• *Rajiv (Gandhi) is enough to defeat the Congress. There is no need for an opposition.*

■ V.P. SINGH in *Sunday*

• *If the people of India have identified Mr Rajiv Gandhi as a thief, Mr V.P. Singh has been recognised all over the country as the man who catches thieves.*

■ R.K. HEGDE quoted in *Far Eastern Economic Review*

• *If you want to cut a tree, do not seek government permission. Just go ahead and do it. From now on the capital of India is Sisauli.*

■ MAHENDRA SINGH TIKAIT addressing followers at the Boat Club in New Delhi

• *I don't know whether my voice will carry weight, but I can tell you my voice cannot be silenced.*

■ CHANDRA SHEKHAR in *Sunday*

• *I am nobody's agent, except my own conscience.*

■ H.N. BAHUGUNA, in response to charges of his being a Congress(I) agent, in *The Sunday Observer*

• *Chandan (Jyoti Basu's son) is like my son.*

■ JATIN CHAKRABORTY, former PWD minister in the Jyoti Basu Ministry, in *The Telegraph*

• *You cannot sell your soul for votes.*

■ INDRAJIT GUPTA, CPI leader, in *The Sunday Observer*

• *It is an insult to India and her traditions.*

■ M.F. HUSAIN, on being evicted from the Willingdon Sports Club, in *The Telegraph*

• *Till today, I have not raised my voice in protest. If I raise my voice and start a movement, do you think they (the Government) can stop me?*

■ SYED ABDULLAH BUKHARI, shahi imam of Jama Masjid, in *Gentleman*

• *The problem with Satyajit Ray is that he's always sitting on a pedestal. I want to bring him down.*

■ MRINAL SEN in *The Times of India Sunday Review*

• *I cannot be called an exhibitionist.... But a swimming costume does not frighten me.*

■ MADHURI DIXIT in *Filmfare*

• *Rekha is my idol. I know I am beautiful. I know I am talented. I am Rekha.*

■ REKHA in *Sunday*

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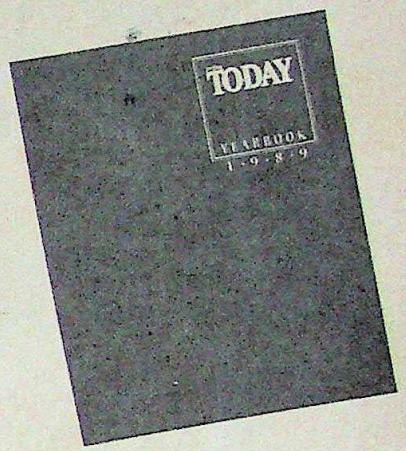

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DRAWING THE LION

■ The family planning programme may not be such a roaring success with the country's 80 crore human population. But with the lions at the Trichur zoo in Kerala, it's an entirely different story.

The lions had created a minor population explosion

in the zoo, their numbers increasing in leaps and bounds. Confounding the problem of the zoo authorities was a ban on the export and sale of lions to circus companies. And, the lions, being of the less popular Afro-Asian breed, were not exactly welcome in other zoos either.

So, the authorities faced a serious space crunch: 21 lions and just three cages. They had no option but to cramp the lions' style, housing seven to a cage. Mercifully, someone soon hit on a plan to vasectomise them. Since then, they've had telling results. But have taken the precaution of reserving two non-vasectomised lions for breeding purposes. Just in case the tide turns.

SURPRISE SUCCESS

■ Victims of robberies have long since given up hope of the police catching the thief. But recently, the police managed to nab a criminal even before a complaint was lodged. More astonishing, the stolen goods were returned to their owner.

These strange events took place when a man landed up at a New Delhi police station to report a theft. Even as he was giving details, a mobile police van nabbed a dubious looking character.

The man, Abdus Sattar was in the process of disposing off the booty worth Rs 20,000—which, as luck would have it, belonged to the complainant. But before Sattar could do so, the police surprised him. Equally taken aback was Sattar's victim—who could hardly believe that he had recovered his stolen goods. But most surprised of all were the cops—they were utterly astonished at having cracked the case so soon.

KING-SIZED CRIME

■ Video parlours usually manage to get the better of their customers by fobbing off poor quality film prints on them. Recently, however, it was the video parlours in Hyderabad that were at the receiving end. But it took no less than a nawab to turn the tables on them.

Last fortnight the police arrested Nawab Mirza Zulkadar Baig, 31, for hoodwinking scores of parlours to the tune of over Rs 2 lakh. The wily nawab had a simple modus operandi—he would win the trust of video dealers, hire their equipment for private use, mortgage it and disappear with the cash.

But once the local police got wind of the con-man's activities, he was unceremoniously shunted behind bars. It seems that the nawab's addiction to horse-racing had driven him to crime. Now his blue-blooded ancestors must surely be turning in their graves.

POLICE GO POP

■ Bruce Springsteen may not have created an acute awareness of human rights through his concert, but he seems to have helped the Delhi Police develop a ear for music. It's a pity, though, that the cops chose to display their new-found love at rather incongruous moments.

The occasion for some boisterous pop music was the farmers' recent dharna at New Delhi's Boat Club. The farmers were orchestrating a steady chorus of demands one night when bingo! came ear-shattering strains of pop numbers from the loudspeakers of a patrol jeep parked nearby. The music—obviously designed to drown the peasant voices—brought forth a howl of protest from the kisans.

While senior officials refused to sing to the press as to who was responsible, one officer said: "It must be an IPS man as none of the constables would choose western pop."

SNAKE SCARE

■ The driver of the bus bound from Madanapalle to Piler in Andhra Pradesh brought the vehicle to a screeching halt. Lying on the road was no less than a cobra and the God-fearing man refused to drive over it. The journey was resumed only after the snake was seen to slither away. Its destination, however, turned out to be not the neighbouring bushes but the bus itself. In fact, the slithery creature appeared right under the steering wheel of the unsuspecting driver.

The next scene was somewhat predictable. Panic-stricken passengers charged out of the bus. One of a creed with the driver, they were either too religious to harm the creature or just plain scared. Finally, it required all the skills of a snake-charmer to woo the reptile out of the bus. The journey was delayed by a couple of hours. But all's well that ends well.

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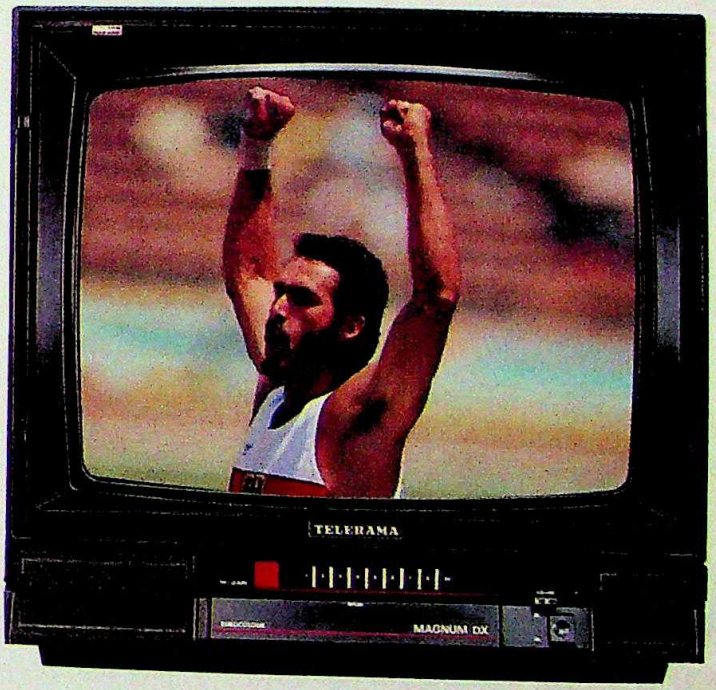

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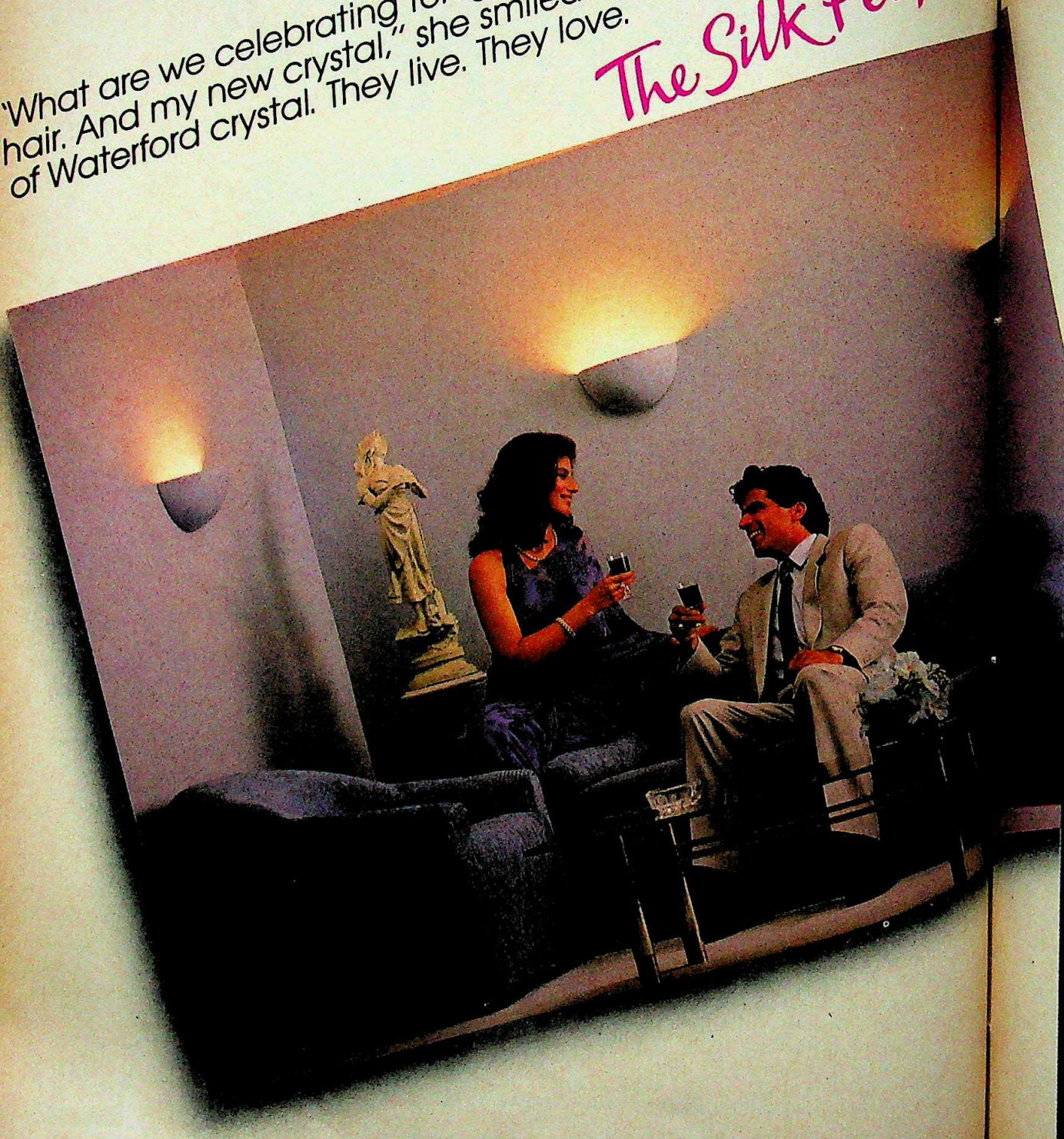
"What are we celebrating tonight?" he asked. "Your first grey hair. And my new crystal," she smiled. Their laughter, the tinkle of Waterford crystal. They live. They love.

The Silk People



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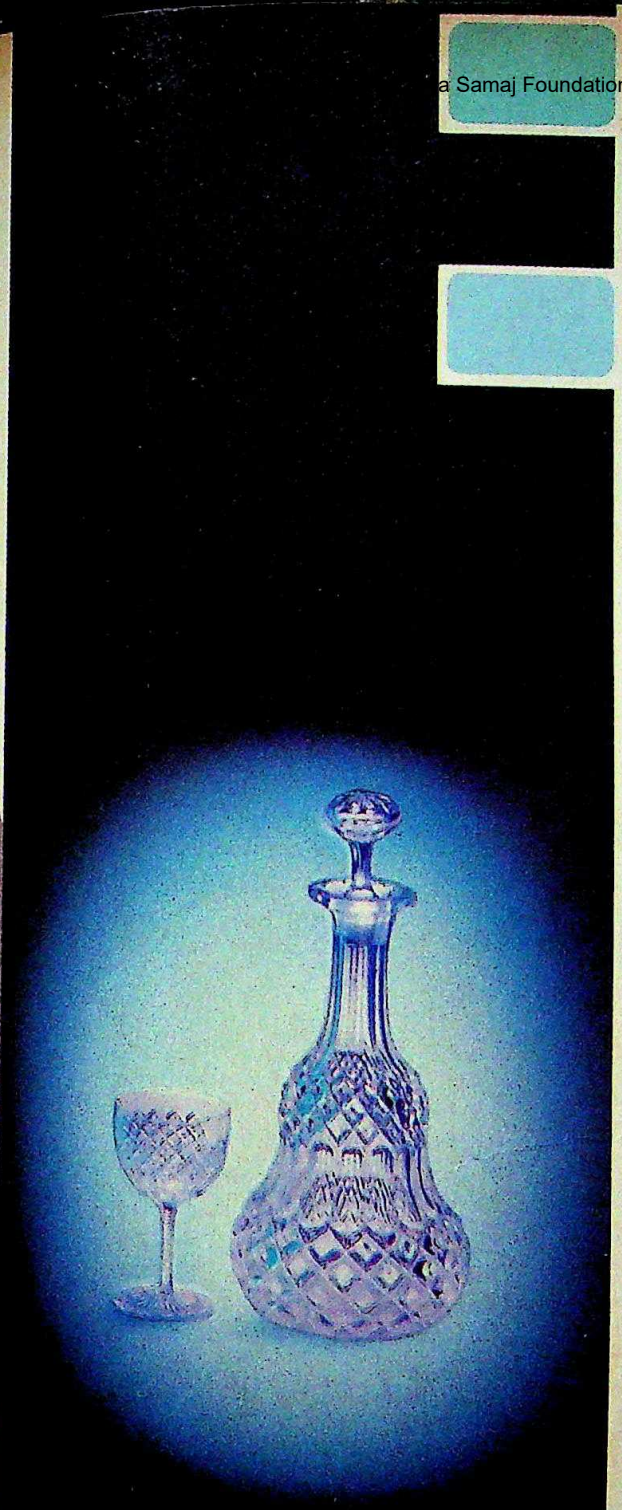

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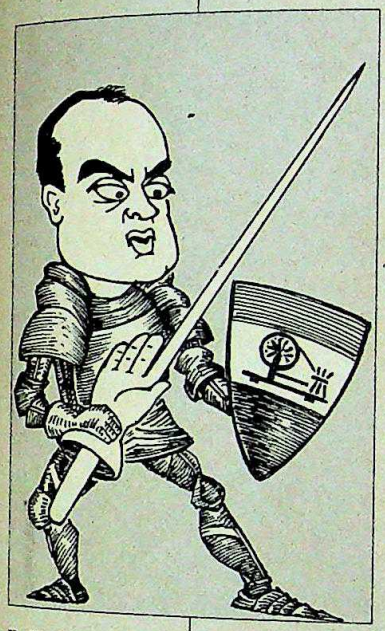
Offensive Postures

THERE was a combative edge to the fortnight that was, a pugnacity of purpose that has not been in evidence for some time now. With unobtrusive suddenness, we are witness to an onslaught of offensives, some inspired by circumstance, others by deliberate design. But taken together, they represent a new and aggressive phase in the march of moments, a sudden burst of adrenalin at the sight of the tape.



Rajiv displays a new aggressiveness, spearheading a frontal assault on the Opposition and, the independent media.

Paradoxically, the biggest offensive turned out to be something of a damp firecracker. India's rapid deployment of the army to foil a coup attempt in the Maldives was an ideally-conceived military and diplomatic operation. But the fact that the invaders fled before the Indian force arrived, and were finally tackled by the navy on the high seas, deprived the event of the requisite drama. Even more of a dilution was the realisation that the mercenaries were Tamil militants from Jaffna, members of the same group who had been earlier trained—and armed—by Indian intelligence agencies.

But despite the ironies—and the fact that not many Indians can locate Maldives on the map—the event did much to salvage Indian diplomatic pride in the light of its less successful military operations in Sri Lanka. By responding so quickly and with such ruthless efficiency, New Delhi re-emphasised its clout and its ambition to play the regional gendarme.

It was, however, the offensives launched on the domestic battlefield that were perhaps of more immediate relevance. Obviously with an eye on the coming elections, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has started to display a new aggressiveness. In the past fortnight, he has spearheaded a frontal assault on the Opposition and, somewhat surprisingly, on the independent media as well.

In part, the pep and pugnacity is a reflection of a new-found confidence. But essentially, it is a strategy aimed at appealing directly to the rural masses who will be his best bet in the coming electoral battle. That strategy was also amply mirrored in the populist resolutions adopted at the AICC(I) session held in New Delhi, an elaborate menu of welfare and poverty-related schemes that even Mrs Gandhi, the master of populism, had not dared to promise in her most desperate moments.

If Rajiv was in a battling mood, his political nemesis, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, was not lagging far behind either. In an uncharacteristic burst of aggression, Singh went for the party's jugular—the prime minister himself. For the first time since his abdication from the party-fold, Singh directly accused Rajiv Gandhi of being a recipient in the Bofors pay-offs. Though his action may have been a trifle hasty, it did inspire Rajiv to state that his government had never claimed that no commissions had been paid. That only puzzled the public even more.

In an uncharacteristic burst of aggression, V.P. Singh went for the party's jugular—the prime minister himself.

Illustrations by MANJULA PADMANABHAN

Another government lie was nailed in Punjab—and in the most tragic fashion. Barely had Governor S.S. Ray and police chief K.P.S. Gill stated that the law and order situation was under control when terrorists launched their bloodiest offensive in recent memory. In just over a fortnight, 175 people had died, including the first serving general in the Indian Army to be killed by terrorists, Major General B.N. Kumar.

The good news was on the economic front. With prospects of a bumper harvest increasing, all signals indicate that the economy is poised for a boom, at least in the coming months. That, of course, only reinforces the old adage that for every cloud there is a silver lining.

—DILIP BOBB

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NATIONAL POLITICS

Mounting Aggression

The national political stage hotted up last fortnight with the Congress(I) and the Opposition joining battle against each other. While the ruling party is labelling opposing forces anti-national, the Opposition relentlessly targets the Bofors gun deal. In the din and dust of war another spectre is taking shape—the possibility of a mid-term poll.

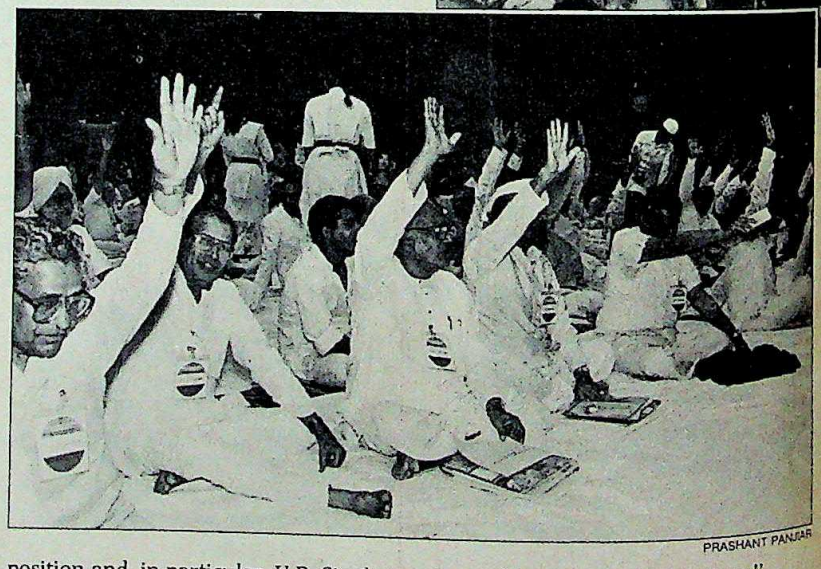
IT seems just like old times. After a protracted and unofficial cease-fire, the epic battle between the ruling party and the Opposition has been rejoined with much greater ferocity than ever before. With both camps deciding that offence is the best defence, the political temperature is rapidly climbing to the level that existed when the Bofors virus was raging.

Thus, it should only be fitting that the main weapon in the Opposition's (read V.P. Singh) electoral arsenal is once again the biggest unsolved scandal during the Rajiv Gandhi reign. Last fortnight, at a public meeting, Singh took the issue a dangerous step further when he directly accused Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of being a Rs 8.8-crore beneficiary of the Bofors pay-offs *(see box)*.

The ruling party reacted sharply—and with practised predictability. Four senior ministers demanded that Singh back his accusations with proof or quit politics. If the theatrics were more for effect than illumination, it could hardly have been any other way. With both sides saddled with serious credibility problems and uninspiring leaders, the coming electoral contest seems destined to degenerate into a dirty war.

The man who started the below-the-belt bashing was none other than Rajiv himself. Barnstorming the countryside, the prime minister lost no opportunity in lashing out at the Opposition in the most virulent manner. His branding of them as "casteist" and "opportunists" seemed charitable compared to his statements where he accused the Opposition of being "anti-national" without any commitment to the country and its problems. At a party rally in New Delhi last fortnight, Rajiv declared: "Our enemies are not the enemies of the Congress alone. They are also the enemies of the nation."

But behind the heated rhetoric the outlines of the Congress(I)'s game plan for the run up to the elections were evident: a no-holds-barred offensive against the Opposition and, in particular, V.P. Singh; a parallel offensive against the print media in a bid to blunt their effectiveness and credibility; and a massive public relations exercise designed to change the prime minister's image from one of pro-rich to pro-poor. Boasts Sita Ram Kesari, AICC's permanent treasurer: "Those who painted Rajivji as pro-rich stand exposed today. He is the only leader of the country who understands poverty and the genuine problems of weaker sections."



PRASHANT PANJIAR

The creaking machinery of the ruling party has already been kicked into life by the biggest-ever rally staged by the ruling party in Delhi. In continuation of the effort to mobilise—and motivate—grassroots workers, the party held a two-day AICC session in the capital.

That the main target in the new offensive would be V.P. Singh was evident at the AICC session. Attended by over

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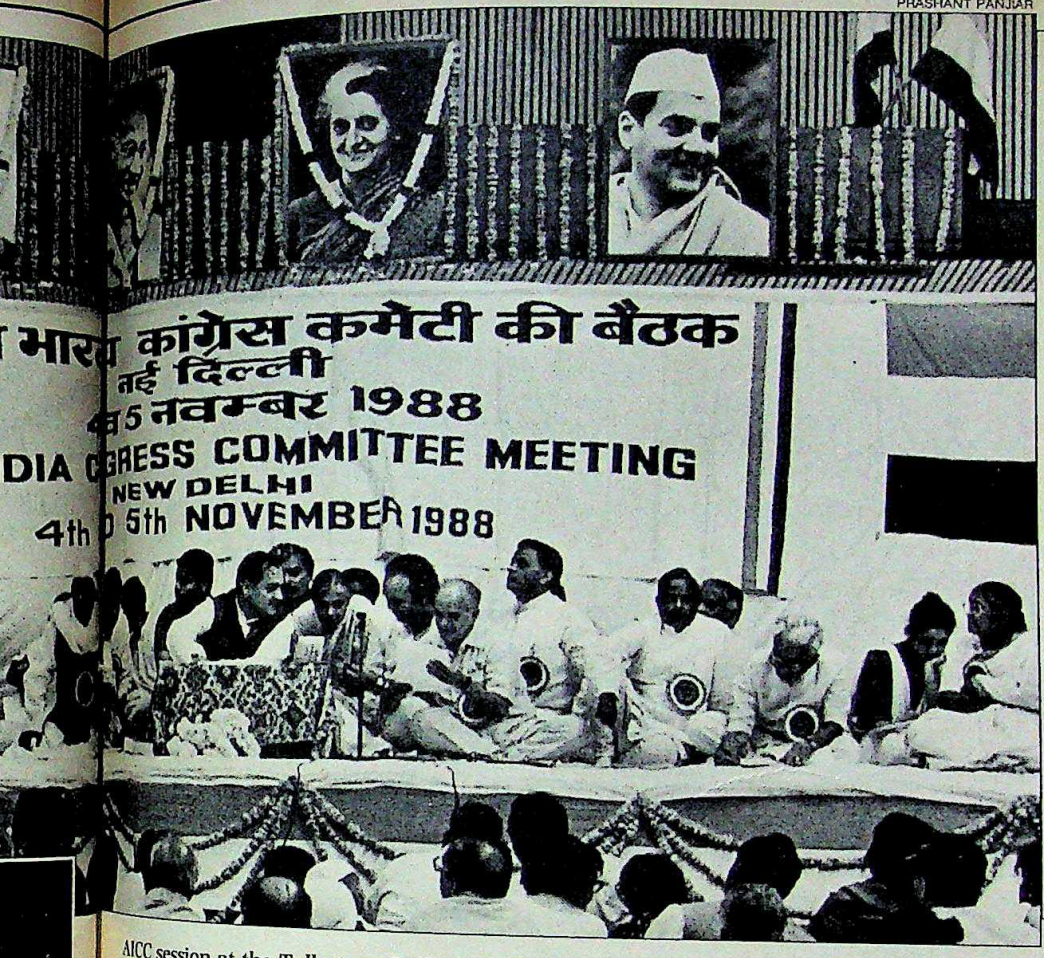
PRASHANT PANJIAR



"Let these paperwallahs and magazinewallahs write what they want to write, but 20 years later... they will hail our ideology."

◆

"I do not want to talk much about the Opposition because it is wastage of time to do so."

◆

"Jo hamari virodhi party hai, vo bilkul expose ho jayegi aur nangi ho jayegi". (our Opposition will be exposed and stand naked).

◆

"Our enemies are not the enemies of the Congress alone. They are also the enemies of the nation."

RAJIV GANDHI

AICC session at the Talkatora Stadium (above and below): battle preparations

1,500 delegates including all Congress chief ministers, PCC(I) chiefs, Congress MPs and state and Central ministers, the party openly declared Singh as its number one enemy. The 150-odd people chosen to address the session, including Union ministers like Bhajan lal, Buta Singh and party office-bearers like Sita Ram Kesari and V.N. Gadgil, named Singh 97 times. Home Minister Buta Singh charged that Singh was the most dishonest person in the country and his Allahabad election campaign had been "financed by smugglers from Bombay".

THE prime minister also singled out non-Congress run states for special treatment. After dithering over the issue for over a year, Rajiv finally decided to appoint full time PCC chiefs in Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. All three were headed by Union ministers like Janardan Poojary, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and J. Vengal Rao. They were replaced by more senior people like A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhury, Janardhan Reddy and Virendra Patil, all recalled from political wilderness.

But the large question mark that hovered over the deliberations was whether all the sudden election related activities pointed to a mid-term poll. The two AICC sessions in quick succession are significant in themselves. A majority of its members were elected in 1972 and represent the grassroots level leadership. It is only through them that the party can neutralise the opposition propaganda at the district and village level. Says Ghulam Nabi Azad, AICC general secretary: "By holding the session at regular intervals we want to keep the local leadership informed about the issues and involve them in the decision-making." Adds Gadgil: "It is through these lower and middle-level functionaries that the party can reach out to the people."

One possibility is that the party is waiting for the outcome of state elections in Tamil Nadu, Mizoram, Nagaland and Delhi before deciding on whether to hold a snap general election. Even so, the resolutions at the public rally and the AICC session detailing the party's new programmes read suspiciously like an election manifesto. Said A.K. Antony, Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee president: "This session was more contentful than eventful. We had serious discussions and were able to identify the issues clearly."

The number one issue for the party, of course, is the attempt to tailor the prime minister's image to appeal to the rural masses. For the first time during the last four years, the AICC launched an attack on monopoly houses and hailed the public sector. The eight page resolution advised the Government to "remain vigilant in curbing the growth of monopolistic tendencies in the industrial and commercial life of the nation".

Resorting to extreme levels of populism, the AICC resolution promised:

► Employment opportunities for at least one adult member of each rural family below the poverty line.

► Provision of adequate nutrition for children below the poverty line.

► Provision of two sarees to adult women below the poverty line—free to destitutes and on subsidised rates to others.

► Supply of essential commodities like foodgrains, pulses, edible oil, kerosene oil

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at reasonable rates.

- Voting rights for 18-year-old.
- More job opportunities for the women.

But the session wasn't all smooth sailing. There were sharp differences between the party and the Government on the economic resolution which underwent at least three rewrites before being adopted. An 11 member panel under Gadgil was appointed to draft the resolution. Gadgil submitted a four page draft to the CWC meeting held the next day. The draft urged the Government to step up poverty alleviation programmes and dedicate itself to socialist policies. Gadgil's draft was found wanting and yet another committee with Vasant Sathe, N.K.P. Salve, Bindeshwari Dubey, former Kerala chief minister K. Karunakaran and Rajasthan Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur was constituted by the prime minister to redraft the resolution. But due to conflicting views, the final draft was delayed while additional doses of populism were injected. Clearly, the party felt populism was the need of the electoral hour, while the Government had a worried eye on where the resources would come from.

IN fact, the first protest came from Finance Minister S.B.Chavan who felt that his department would not be able to find the Rs 3,500 crore required for the schemes pledged in the resolution. The prime minister also directed his Special Secretary Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Finance Secretary S. Venkataraman to assess the financial implications.

Meanwhile, Rajiv asked another set of politicians to examine the resolution afresh. Six of them, Finance Minister Chavan, Human Resources Development Minister P. Shiv Shanker, Planning Minister Madhavsinh Solanki, Textile Minister Ram Niwas Mirdha and Karunakaran held a meeting where Chavan insisted that the elaborate welfare schemes be pruned. He was supported by Mirdha. It was only after this that the proposal to introduce a mid-day meal scheme all across the country, to supply two dhotis to the poor along with foodgrains at subsidised rates, were dropped. The total outlay was reduced to Rs 2,000 crore.

Party stalwarts also bore upon the prime minister to dispel the image that he was under the influence of a coterie of bureaucrats. Though officials like Suman Dubey and Mani Shanker Aiyer are always involved in framing the contents of the prime minister's speeches, this time no

BOFORS CONTROVERSY

Heat, Dust and Farce

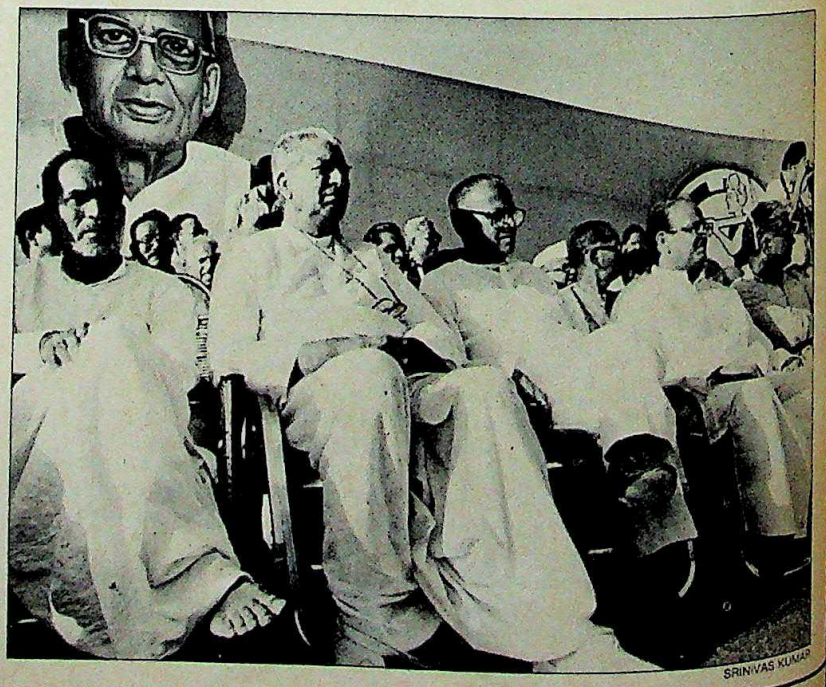
IT had the thunder of a Howitzer cannon-ball, but when the huge cloud of dust settled, it turned out to be an empty shell. And the nation was left with the unseemly sight of its political heavyweights sniping at each other with rubber bullets. Meanwhile, the Bofors enigma was no clearer than it has been since June, when *The Hindu* published sheaves of documents proving commissions were paid by the Swedish arms manufacturer on that country's biggest-ever arms deal—the sale of 155 mm Howitzer guns to India.

Things had been quiet on the Bofors front since *The Hindu*'s revelations. These included a series of vouchers of payment to the Panama-based Svenska Incorporated. The vouchers mentioned a Swiss Bank Corporation account number (99921 TU) in Geneva, the codename Lotus for the recipient, and specified that the payments were a percentage "commission due to you on material supplied to The Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Defence".

It was with precisely these facts that V.P. Singh, Janata Dal president, sought to raise a storm at a public meeting in Patna last fortnight. However, there was a difference in presentation between the newspaper and the politician. While *The Hindu* had stopped with the facts, Singh added a touch of spice by pointing out that Lotus is English for the Sanskrit Rajiv and so the commissions had gone to the prime minister himself. Then, Singh dramatically added the challenge that "I will renounce public life if Mr Gandhi sticks to his statement within and without Parliament that all winding up charges had been paid before 1986."

So voluminous had *The Hindu*'s documentation been that most readers had not digested the wealth of detail. Singh was therefore presumed to be saying something new, indeed that he had proof of Rajiv Gandhi's personal involvement in the corruption. Rajiv categorically denied it. "Neither do I have, nor did I ever have, an account in Switzerland or anywhere else, except when I was a student," he said.

While the ruling party had been reduced to shuffling its feet when *The Hindu* initially published the proof that commissions were paid, it was now in a combative mood. In the process, members kept tripping over themselves as clumsily as Singh had. Asked about the proof that commissions were paid, Rajiv told reporters that he have never denied



SRINIVAS KUMAR

Opposition leaders at the launching of Janata Dal: continuing problems

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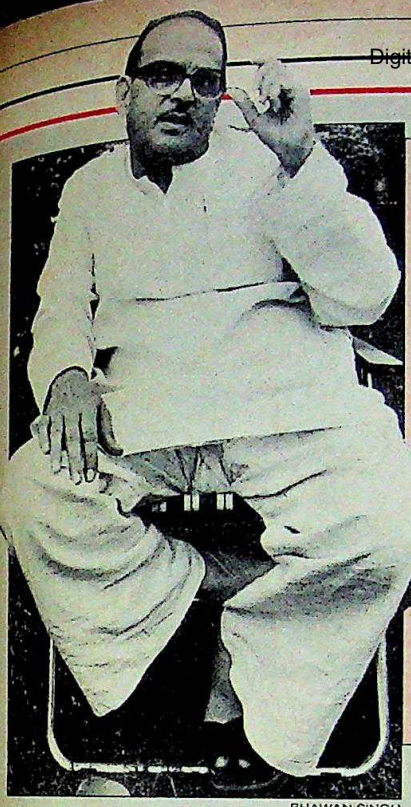

BHAWAN SINGH

So voluminous had The Hindu's documentation been that most readers had not digested the wealth of detail. Singh was therefore presumed to be saying something new.

◆

There was a difference in presentation between the newspaper and the politician. While The Hindu had stopped with the facts, Singh pointed out that Lotus is English for the Sanskrit Rajiv.

it. This was patently false. The Government line has progressively changed to accommodate new evidence but it had initially insisted that Bofors paid no one anything. An official spokesman quibbled the next day, saying that Rajiv had only meant that *The Hindu*'s reports had not been denied.

Even the Government did not at first realise that Singh's documents were old drafts pre-prepared in the Prime Minister's Office were in evidence.

That perhaps, explains why the resolutions lacked any innovative ideas. In fact, many of the resolutions—like reducing the voting ages—have already been voiced by the Opposition. Asked V.P. Singh: "What is new in the Congress programme?" And added N.T.Rama Rao: "My government has already implemented these schemes, they have only incorporated them in their resolution."

But while the Opposition can gleefully accuse the ruling party of hijacking its ideas, it has little else to chortle about. The unified image it has been desperately striving for over the past few months remains a distant dream. By last week, it seemed as if the proposed merger of the Janata, Lok Dal and Jan Morcha would miss the deadline of November 15. A Jan Morcha convention, attended by its National Convenor Ram Dhan and a few other leaders, decided to keep its separate identity and not merge with the Janata. In order to avoid embarrassment, Singh dissociated himself from the resolution—and the convention. But it was a rude reminder of the pitfalls ahead.

Then, the Lok Dal chief H.N. Bahuguna threw another spanner in the unity moves by refusing to convene the requisitioned meeting of his party. Sharad Yadav, Lok Dal general secretary and Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal were forced to summon their supporters to ratify the merger proposals. Said Yadav: "Janata Dal is a reality and only those who want to help Rajiv Gandhi want to keep away from it." As of now, the Janata Dal is a one-man party consisting of V.P.Singh as president, pending the official merger and the appointment of other office bearers.

To pre-empt any further embarrassments, V.P.Singh has already held a series of meetings with Chandra Shekhar, Devi lal and Ramakrishna Hegde, to finalise the office-bearers. Though the intra-party friction in the Lok Dal and the Janata Party are certain to cause more headaches, the fact that they were together as constituents of the seven party National Front gave cause for opposition cheer. The front will be organising massive public meetings in north India. Rama Rao and V.P. Singh have also been talking to the communists and BJP leaders to frame a common programme of action and the possibility of seat adjustments for the parliamentary elections. Said Devi Lal: "People have decided to throw out Rajiv. It is for us to provide an alternative."

But bogged down they are in their own internal squabbles, and the Congress offensive is beginning to acquire an added momentum. Rajiv has made it clear that he is taking the battle into the enemy camp and is in a mood of aggression that is in sharp contrast to his defensive posture a few months ago. Whether the general elections are held as scheduled or before time, the war is already on. And, the Queensberry Rules have been put aside.

—PRABHU CHAWLA

tle to a farce. Bihar Pradesh Congress chief Tariq Anwar opened the round, announcing that Singh deposited $ 5 million (Rs 7 crore) in a secret Swiss account while he was a minister. His code-name: 'Peacock'. Four days later, Minister for Energy Vasant Sathe followed suit, even giving Singh's alleged account number. The codename, he said, was Universe (Vishwa, the first part of Singh's name, means Universe).

Singh seized on the handle to reply in the same vein. "The Government is collectively responsible for what a minister says. I will give them full authority to open that account. They can use the money for the Amethi election, or transfer it to the Lotus account," he joked.

Singh seemed quite happy to fight back on the farcical level. He had earlier reined himself in when faced with the more serious challenge of proving his charge. "I have learnt that on this everything should be in writing," he stated, refusing to go over what he had said in Patna. His written statements, about one a day, only laboured points that had been publicly made months ago—that middlemen had been involved, that 'commissions' were paid and not just 'winding up charges', and so on. Meanwhile, the crucial question of who finally benefited from the payments to the front companies—Svenska, AE Services, and Pitco—still remain open.

—DAVID DEVADAS

hat. Four of the most important members of the Union Cabinet, P.V. Narasimha Rao, K.C. Pant, S.B. Chavan and P. Shiv Shankar, hurriedly signed a statement refuting the Rajiv's involvement. Denying the allegations as "wild, false, baseless and politically motivated", they turned Singh's challenge back on him: "If Mr Singh fails to prove such charges, he should retire from public life in accordance with his statement."

Other Congressmen reduced the bat-

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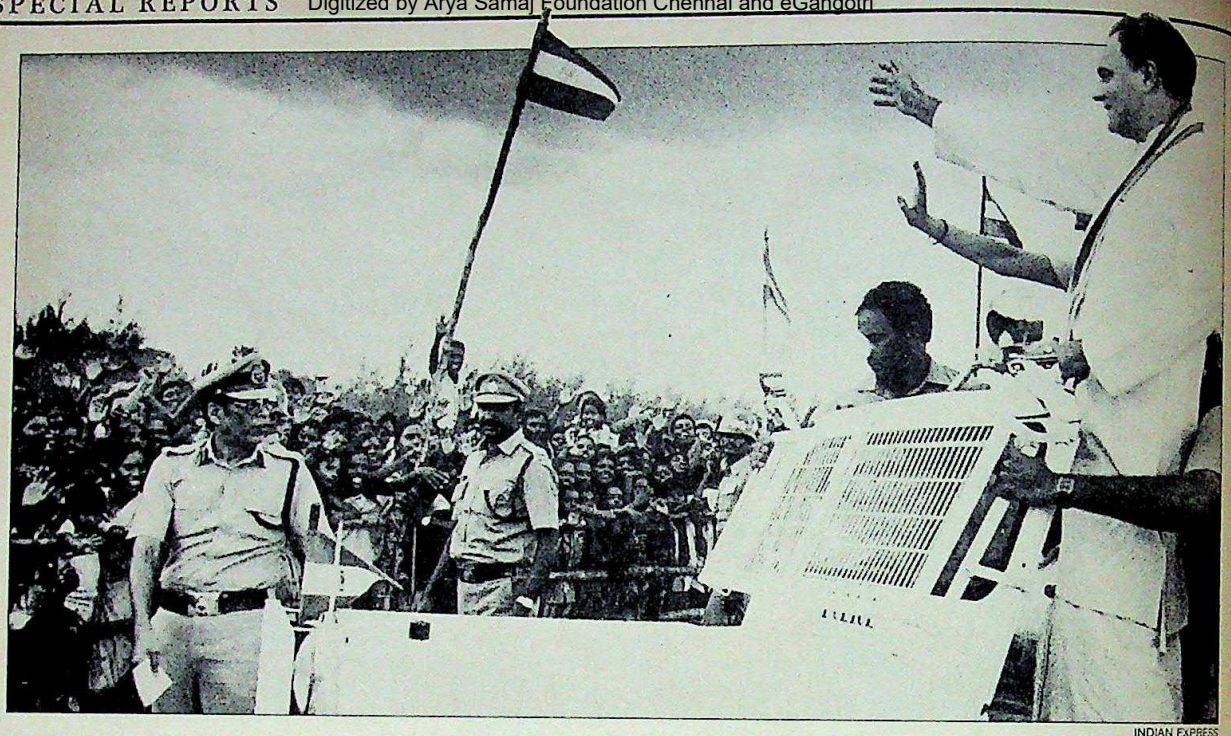

INDIAN EXPRESS

TAMIL NADU

Changing Fortunes

For more than a decade Tamil Nadu was MGR's personal fiefdom, where every political party was marginalised and reduced to insignificance, the Congress(I) included. But now, with assembly elections two months away, Tamil Nadu is territory up for grabs; and Rajiv Gandhi and his party are pulling out all the stops to ensure that they can stake a claim.

THE Congress(I) coming to power in Tamil Nadu, a state dominated by regional parties? Incredible as it may sound, the possibility is not as remote as it was a year ago when MGR straddled the state like a colossus, reducing all adversaries to political pygmies. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi certainly believes it could happen; so do many Congressmen. Or else they would not be expending so much energy on the state.

No state has received the kind of attention that Rajiv has lavished on Tamil Nadu: in two months the busy prime minister has come visiting four times; he has covered all the 39 Lok Sabha constituencies; visited about 175 assembly constituencies; and addressed 10 large and 100 small public meetings attended by over 20 lakh people all over the state.

It is no sudden affection for the Tamilians that is drawing Rajiv repeatedly to their state, but the desire for victory at the assembly elections scheduled for January next year. An electoral victory is sorely needed to boost the sagging images of both Rajiv and the Congress(I)—and they are clearly hoping that the Tamil Nadu polls will reverse their steadily declining fortunes.

The Tamil Nadu Congress(I) Committee (TNCC-I) has taken its cue from Rajiv and has been working overtime. In a rented hall in Royapettah, a slum in central Madras, two dozen temporary employees feed raw data daily into a dozen personal computers and painstakingly prepare weekly reports on the state of the Congress(I) in Tamil Nadu. These reports are then sent to New Delhi, where they are carefully scrutinised by party bosses.

In top priority Tamil Nadu the formidable task of infusing new life into the virtually moribund party infrastructure at the district-level has been given to TNCC(I) chief G.K. Moopanar. Moopanar and other office-bearers have been assigned time-bound tasks and given responsibility of specific areas. In addition, Congressmen are expected to provide information on the activities of their opponents; pin-point the issues likely to be raised during the campaigning; and give an estimate of the strength and weaknesses of candidates belonging to both opposition parties and the Congress(I).

Moopanar is certainly taking his job

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Rajiv Gandhi in South Arcot district; and (right) Jayalalitha: personality-cult

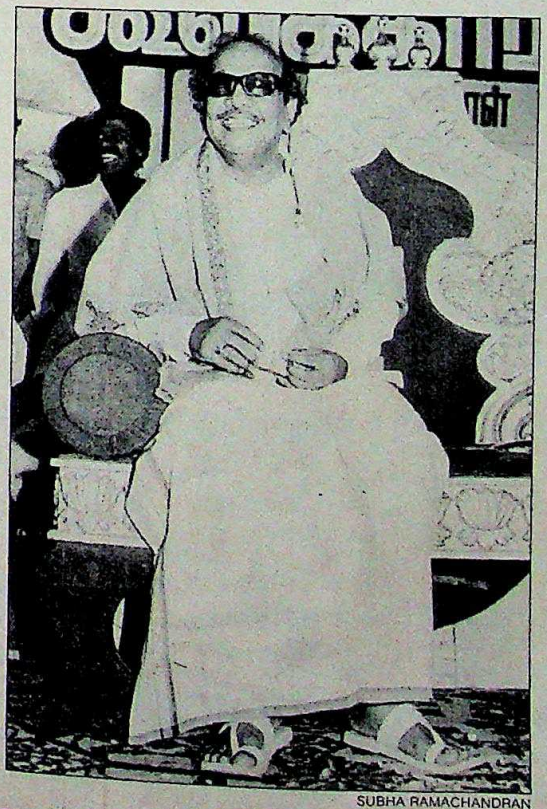
seriously. Under him, the party has launched a public relations blitzkrieg throughout the state. Already, he has begun forming polling booth committees to monitor the 40,000 odd polling booths in the state. Aside from manning the booths, these committees have been instructed to:

- Hold at least one public meeting every week.
- Personally visit a minimum of 100 houses each week.
- Organise one cultural programme every month.
- Distribute posters and other publicity material daily.
- Collect funds for the party.

Initially, there was a poor response from the polling booth committees. But at a meeting between the state's Congress(I) leaders and Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi last fortnight, Union Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram claimed that over 35,000 of the 42,700 committees were functioning efficiently. So much importance is being given to these committees that Rajiv himself will be addressing them at a rally later this month.

Despite mobilising the entire party machinery, the Congress(I)'s campaign rests largely on the shoulders of one man—Rajiv Gandhi. In a state where politics has always been dominated by personalities—Annadurai and MGR to name just two—the Congress(I) has shrewdly chosen to project a larger-than-life Rajiv Gandhi. So Rajiv hugs poor children on the roadside; visits villages and makes it a point to enter Harijan *jhuggis*; lays the foundation-stone for projects, which he assures his audience, will benefit the poor; and of course, promises development schemes—worth over Rs 150 crore.

While Rajiv carefully cultivates a pro-poor image, his party is taking pains to project him as a latter day Kamaraj—the only Congress leader to have dominated Tamil Nadu politics. There are two good reasons to build the campaign around Rajiv: to fill the void in the local Congress leadership and, more important, to counter the charismatic AIADMK leader Jayalalitha and powerful DMK chief M. Karunanidhi.



DMK leader Karunanidhi: powerful contender

SUBHA RAMACHANDRAN

Says Rangarajan Kumarmangalam, the fiery trade unionist and TNCC(I) general secretary: "We've given a clear choice to the people. Let them elect a government which belongs to Rajiv Gandhi's party or to Karunanidhi's corrupt party."

If huge crowds are a measure of success, then the Congress(I)'s strategy seems to have paid rich dividends—at each of Rajiv's public meetings, there has been a massive turnout; fewer people have attended the meetings called by the two factions of the AIADMK and the DMK. Encouraged by the reception, the Congress(I) plans to extract maximum mileage from the prime minister's image: according to party sources, he will cover all the 224 assembly segments at least twice before the polls. Says a buoyant Moopanar: "We can feel the change in the political environment of the state. Not only is the party united, we are receiving a good response from the people who want to vote for a change."

Moopanar has good reason to be optimistic. On the basis of weekly reports compiled by the polling booth committees, the state unit of the Congress(I) has come to the conclusion that it will sweep the polls and get a comfortable majority (*see chart*). An analysis of the reports processed by the monitoring cell's computer does indeed suggest that the party's prospects have improved tremendously in the last few months. Asserts T. Thangabalu, a TNCC(I) general secretary: "We will win 120 seats. No one can prevent the return of the

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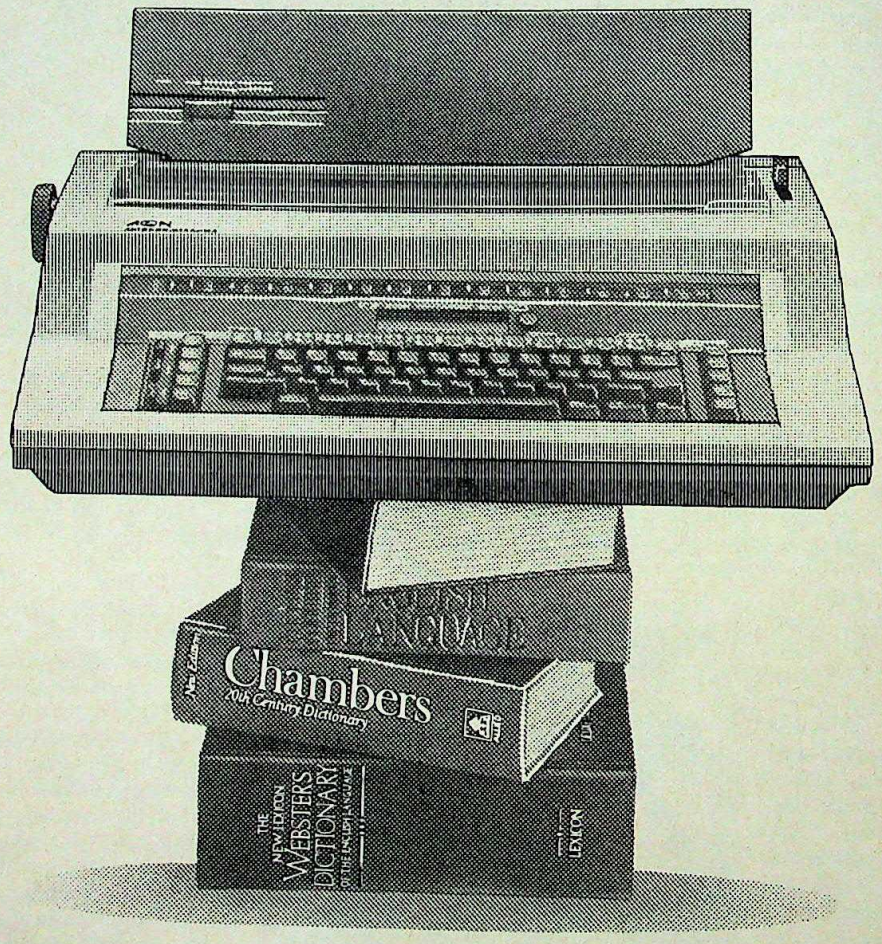

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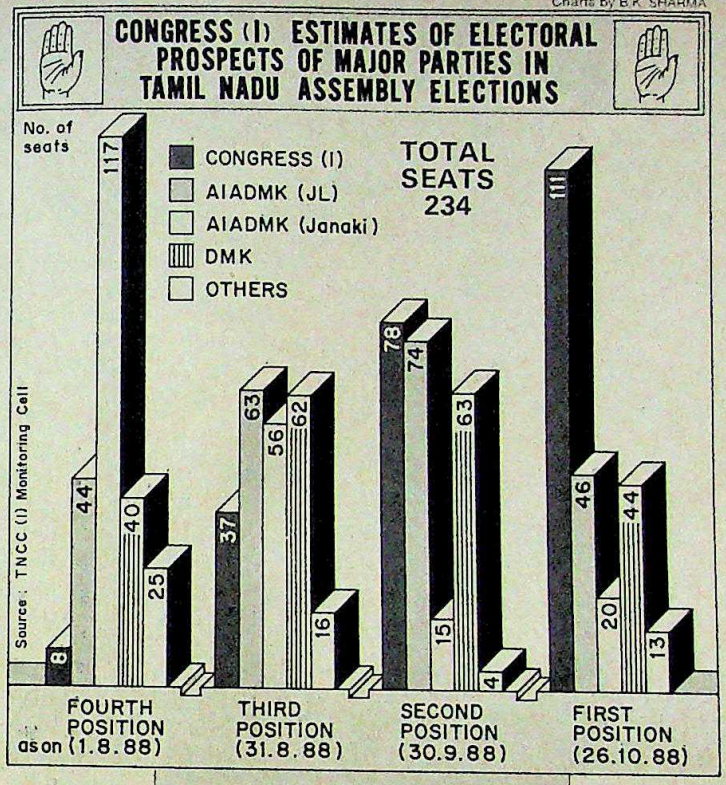
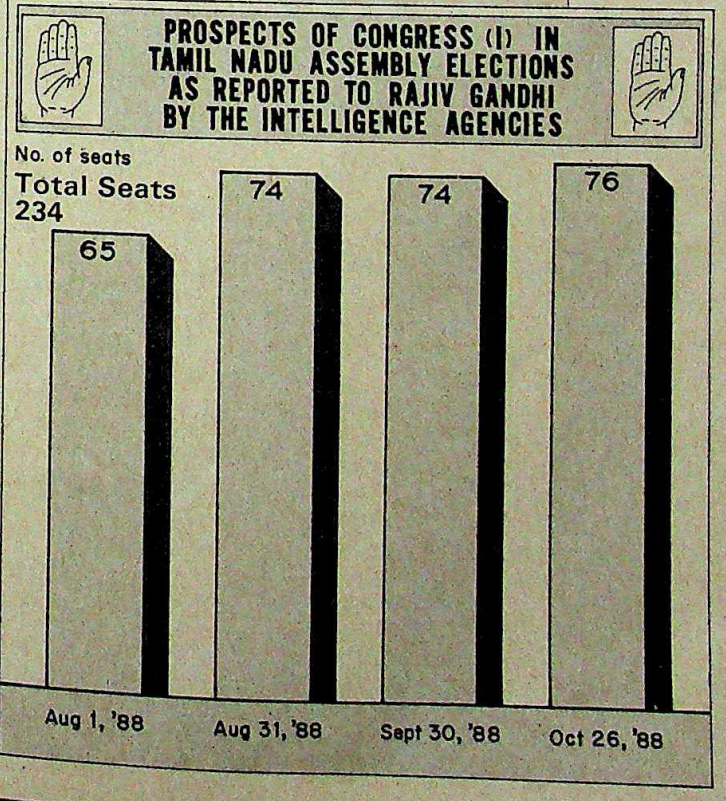


Congress government in Tamil Nadu."

Other independent reports, however, paint a different picture. They stress that the Congress(I) will not get an absolute majority and though Rajiv's personal popularity has shot up, the number of seats the party is likely to win has not gone up significantly (*see chart*).

Rajiv isn't the only Congressman whose popularity is zooming in Tamil Nadu. Governor P.C. Alexander is giving him stiff competition. Party reports clearly state that the Congress(I) has improved its position due to "better administration by the governor and his team of advisors and, secondly, due to the prime minister's visits". There is widespread admiration for President's Rule, during which the administration has been spruced up and development schemes completed. Even the Centre's stiffest opponents have not been able to find fault with Alexander's reign. Says Vyjayanthimala, MP from south Madras: "Governor's rule is a clear indication that it is the Congress party which knows the state's priority and can implement schemes effectively."

The TNCC(I) has concluded that it will sweep the polls. But other reports differ.



Yet, the Congress(I) could well be suffering from a case of over-optimism as the regional parties have not really got into the act as yet. And though Rajiv is being pitted against Karunanidhi, the latter is yet to warm up to the campaign; once he does, he could bridge the gap. Similarly, Jayalalitha's hands have been tied by infighting within her faction of the AIADMK.

As Jayalalitha stormed a south Tamil Nadu constituency—considered a Congress(I) stronghold—and addressed a series of well attended public meetings last fortnight, many Congressmen realised that they could not afford to write her off. She even beat the Congress(I) at its own game—the making of grand promises. Taking a leaf out of the book of her mentor, MGR, the glamorous leading lady of Tamil Nadu politics announced to cheering crowds that if voted to power, her government would reduce the price of rice to Rs 1.50 per kg; extend the noon-meal scheme to all school-going children and other weaker sections; and eradicate unemployment. If the Congress(I) was playing the Harijan and the backward class card, Jayalalitha proved equally adept at luring the young voters along with a large chunk of MGR's die-hard followers.

So large are the crowds that the former cine-star attracts—despite being deserted by many of her closest aides—that in a confidential report to the prime minister, the TNCC(I) has rated her faction of the AIADMK the second most powerful party in the state, the first, obviously, being the Congress(I). Rajiv is therefore under pressure to take no chances and forge an alliance with her. Barring some drastic change in the existing political equations, the Congress(I) is likely to come to an electoral understanding with Jayalalitha. Her faction will probably be allotted about 80 to 100 seats. If the alliance emerges victorious, Jayalalitha will be the deputy chief minister; the chief minister obviously coming from the Congress(I) ranks.

Jayalalitha's gain has been at the cost of her arch-rival and former chief minister Janaki Ramachandran. Though she still draws large women audiences, MGR's widow has slipped badly—largely due to the

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Congress(I)'s aggressive campaign.

The real electoral battle will therefore be fought between the DMK-led opposition front and the Congress(I). The DMK has a clear edge over the Congress(I) in terms of grassroots infrastructure—its party cadres are well entrenched in the districts. Confidential reports prepared by the TNCC(I) admit that the DMK is way ahead in terms of voters' mobilisation and propaganda. Karunanidhi also draws larger crowds than local Congress(I) leaders like Moopanar and he has repeatedly succeeded in embarrassing the Centre by referring to the Sri Lankan imbroglio. Besides, the DMK has made recent inroads into the Harijan vote bank, as the Congress(I) has encouraged the aggressive postures of the Vanniyars (a trading caste) in their fight for job reservations, resisted by the Scheduled Castes for obvious reasons. Says an indignant Karunanidhi: "The prime minister is playing the caste card shamelessly."

Karunanidhi himself is both the DMK's greatest asset and its greatest liability. While he is perceived as a seasoned politician with his finger on the state's pulse, his regime was identified with corruption and a large chunk of the electorate is still wary of him. Explains Cho Ramaswamy, the editor of *Tughlaq*: "In the past, the Tamil electorate has shown their determination to keep Karunanidhi out of the Government. If that hatred still exists, then only the Congress(I) stands to gain now. There is no other alternative." Adds a Tamil industrialist: "The return of Karunanidhi will mean the return of red-tapism, corruption and inefficiency."

The DMK has also had to wrestle with the threat of losing the support of the Muslims—who influence the results in at least 20 assembly seats—after the Muslim League withdrew from the alliance recently. As if this were not enough, there is also a division within the Janata Party on the question of supporting Karunanidhi's party. All this may be to the Congress(I)'s advantage. Yet in a state where MLAs come to fisticuffs, where a leader's legacy is battled over by his mistress and his wife, and where cine idols facilely adorn political garb, nothing can be predicted for certain. What is certain is that Tamil Nadu is in for a volatile electoral battle which far from ending with a bang could quite easily close with the whimper of a coalition government.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Madras

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

G.K. Moopanar: formidable task

G.K. MOOPANAR

"Rajiv will fill the void"

KARUPPIAH Moopanar's assignment in Tamil Nadu—to ensure victory for the Congress(I) in the next assembly elections—is no easy task. But if any man can achieve this goal, it is he. Though the PCC(I) chief inherited a paralysed organisation, through sheer hard work he's infused new life into it. He spends almost 18 hours every day travelling and campaigning for the party. He spoke to INDIA TODAY about the Congress(I)'s strategy to capture the state. Excerpts:

Q. Why is the prime minister coming so often to Tamil Nadu? Does it make any impact?

A. Tamil Nadu is a hero-worshipping state. We worshipped Rajaji, Kamaraj, Anna, Karunanidhi, and then MGR. After MGR, there was a void which Rajiv Gandhi has come to fill. People not only want a change, they want a change for the better. My party is the only one which fits this bill. We've not ruled the state for the last 20 years, while all others fighting against us have, but they've nothing to claim.

Q. But how are you different from the regional parties which you have supported in the past?

A. We will provide a clean government to the state. The people remember the Kamaraj rule as the golden rule. We promise the return of Kamaraj culture if voted to power.

Q. Do you mean those who ruled the state recently were not clean?

A. They themselves are accusing each other of collecting crores of rupees. We're convinced that all the parties who ruled after us gave corrupt and inefficient governments.

Q. But why did you support the corrupt government of MGR?

A. Not always. We weren't part of the Government. On various important issues we opposed MGR. We're going to seek votes in Kamaraj's and Rajiv Gandhi's name and not in MGR's name.

Q. But there are corruption charges against Rajiv as well and voters will compare him with other opposition leaders.

A. Let them compare. We're not hiding Rajiv Gandhi. He is travelling from village to village. We're asking people to vote for his party. We're projecting him as the only leader who can provide a better and stable government. And people of the state know very well that Rajiv Gandhi is the cleanest politician in the country. People don't believe the Opposition at all. Let the Opposition face it.

Q. Is it correct that the Congress(I) wants to capture Tamil Nadu by splitting the Opposition and playing the Vanniyars caste card?

A. The DMK is making a big issue of it because the Vanniyars have called them their enemy number one. We totally disapprove of their approach. They may be having some genuine problems but resorting to violence can't be condoned. There is no need for us to appease any particular community. And as far as the AIADMK split is concerned, it isn't my duty to keep them together. Let the opposition leaders come here and unite them.

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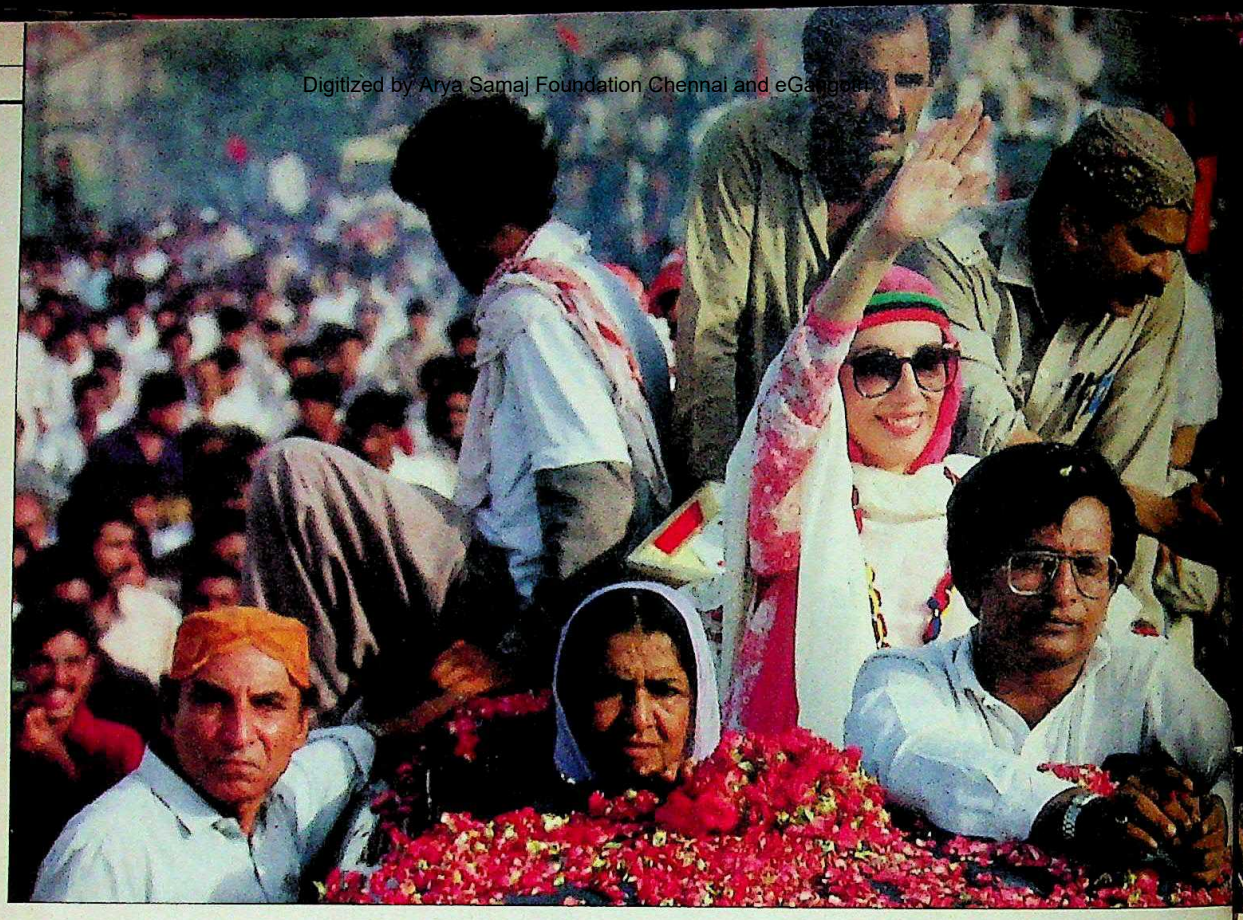

PAKISTAN

A Turning Point

Once the euphoria of elections is over in Pakistan, the problems will surface, as the new government strives to tackle a host of problems—ethnic strife, the breakdown of law and order, a looming economic crisis.

IF there was an emotion which dominated the campaign leading to the November 16 general elections in Pakistan, it was one of doubt and disbelief. For 11 years the late President Zia-ul-Haq toyed with the political structure of the country, reducing many of its participants to a state of juvenile incredulity. But suddenly he was gone, leaving behind a messy record of broken promises. The legacy survives—not even the most optimistic could escape the terrible sense of uncertainty. Even a few days before the poll the questions persisted: will the elections be held? Will they be fair? Will the army agree to a transfer of power if the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) emerged victorious?

Nobody was sure of the answers. What was certain though was that the poll would mark a turning point in Pakistan's history—democracy would get a second, and maybe last, chance. And in one of those family dramas typical of subcontinental politics, the daughter of a slain leader was seen as the best chance for a return to democracy.

For all of last fortnight, the same cry resounded throughout Punjab, the political heartland of Pakistan—*Charon subon ki zanjeer, Benazir, Benazir.* (Benazir, the link between four provinces). It was not just the rhyme that was complete. Politics had come full circle in the strife-torn Islamic state. Almost two decades after Zulfikar Ali Bhutto first swept Pakistan's most important province with his populist slogans, his daughter and political heir was reclaiming his legacy as the only popular leader who could guarantee a united and democratic Pakistan.

The irony was not lost on opponents of Benazir Bhutto's PPP. As Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ghafoor Ahmed, secretary-general of the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA), protested, it was the PPP's refusal to accept the Awami League's success in the 1970 general elections which led to the creation of Bangladesh and the dismemberment of Pakistan. The nation once again seemed perilously close to another division four years later when the elected government in Baluchistan province was dismissed and the army sent in to crush the popular

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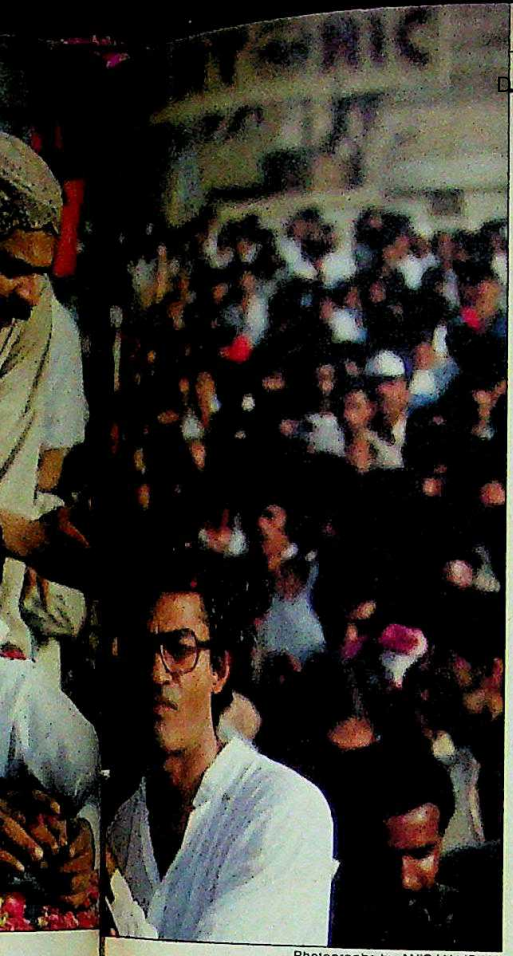

Photographs by ANIS HAMDANI

Benazir in Karachi: street fervour

uprising. But it is a measure of Zia's failure to nurture a political leadership that 11 years after the army overthrew Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, his name evokes a passionate, almost devotional, frenzy from large numbers of Pakistan's 104 million people.

Bhutto is now legend, his failures forgotten, his charisma and political dynamism transformed into an almost supernatural emanation which deifies everyone who bears his name. Bhutto's death by hanging was the final act which transformed the man into a mythical figure, a symbol of defiance against an unjust establishment. As the renowned Pakistani economist Akmal Hussain says: "In the popular psyche, Bhutto's pain and suffering during a long incarceration began to represent the suffering of the people under martial law. His period in the death cell created the image of a prince sacrificing his body in slow degrees for the people. By the form of his death Bhutto passed into folk myth as a fakir."

In the run-up to the November 16 poll, the name of the Fakir Prince spawned a colourful popular culture—slogans, pictures, songs, folk poetry. He was reborn in a bewildering variety of representations—as the suave, wealthy politician in a Saville Row suit; as the heir to the Qaid-e-Azam in a Jinnah cap and sherwani; as the radical leader in Mao cap and coat; as the feudal overlord in a gold-braided jacket; as the saviour of the poor in a Sufi saint's garb, and even as an Islamic warrior in Arab headgear astride a white charger. His voice resounded from taped replays of his old speeches—urgent, evocative, impassioned, faintly feminine. His name echoed constantly through countless slogans, with the chant *Zinda hai Bhutto* acquiring the power and magic of an ancient religious mantra.

> In his last testament, Bhutto predicted that he will enter the 'heart of history'. That 'heart' now throbs at the sight of Benazir.

It is not often that a political party fighting an election possesses such a potent popular symbol. For the PPP, victory seemed assured with the extraordinary power Bhutto's name has to arouse the masses, to encapsulate their hopes and aspirations for the future. Bhutto's mantle now rests on his 35-year-old daughter Benazir. "As he had predicted in his last testament, Bhutto did enter the 'heart of history', " adds Akmal Hussain. "It is this 'heart' that throbs in the public psyche at the sight of Benazir Bhutto."

Against the extraordinary resurrection of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto during the election campaign was the even more extraordinary burial of Zia-ul-Haq, the man who sent Bhutto to the gallows in 1979. The election campaign of the IDA was kicked off at a rally in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and an explosive cauldron of its ethnic groupings. The rally was ignited by the Jamaat-e-Islami chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed declaring that the IDA would strive to launch *jehad* in Kashmir and eventually plant the flag of Islam at the Red Fort in Delhi. But not once did Qazi Hussain or any of the other speakers, including IDA chief Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, mention Zia's name. Nor was there any portrait or slogan to make the audience recall the former President. It is as if the man who had ruled Pakistan with an iron hand for 11 long years, and who died only last August in a sensational plane crash, had never existed at all.

Even the official media in the last few weeks before the elections seemed to have forgotten Zia. The first reference to the dead President in several days on Pakistan TV came with the report of the official

IDA leaders at Karachi rally: show of unity

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investigation into the C-130 crash at Bahawalpur, which concluded that the disaster was caused by sabotage. There was hardly any reference to Zia in the government-controlled newspapers either. The irony was inescapable—the man who had used the awesome power of the state to squash the memory of the leader he had overthrown and hanged had himself become an embarrassment.

In fact, Zia's name was mentioned repeatedly only by his bitter foes, the PPP leaders, rather than by his old allies in the Muslim League and the Jamaat. "Some people mistook the crowd at Zia's funeral for political support," observes Maliha Lodhi, editor of the Islamabad daily *The Muslim*. "But initial attempts to create a cult around Zia were abandoned when it became clear that people want to move away from that period."

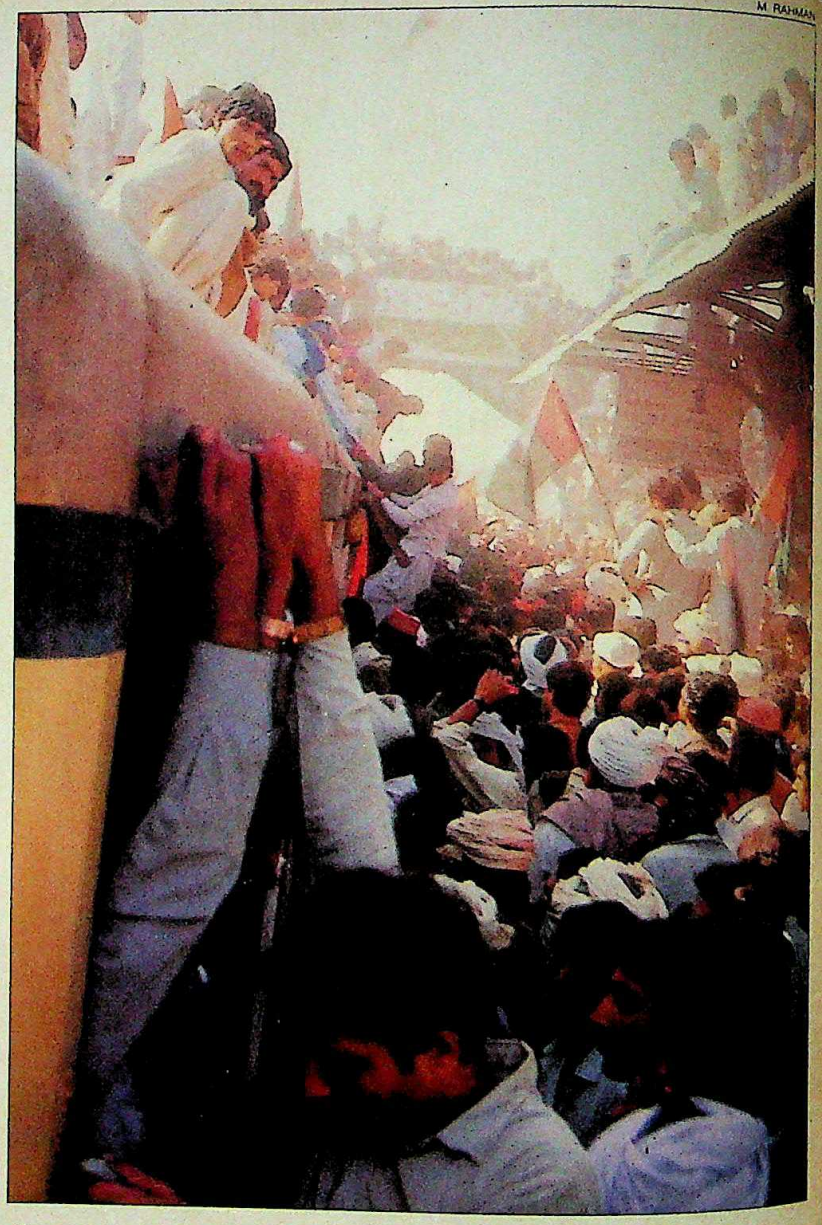
ONLY one important IDA leader continued to bank on Zia's name. Nawaz Sharif, the controversial millionaire handpicked by the former President as the Muslim League chief minister of Punjab, repeatedly emphasised his link with Zia as he hopped around the province in a government plane distributing largesse to flood-stricken villagers. More a flamboyant businessman than a grassroots politician, Sharif needed to establish his political antecedents by evoking the memory of his former patron. This was all the more necessary since the Muslim League faction led by former prime minister Mohammed Khan Junejo was bitterly opposed to Sharif's high-flying political gamesmanship. But Sharif was more likely to get votes by utilising all the resources at his command as chief minister of Punjab than by establishing his links with Zia.

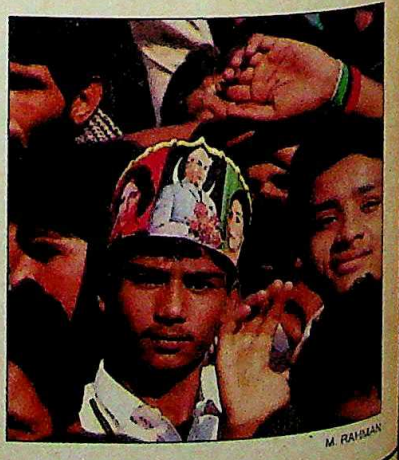
Still, the imprint of the Zia era was evident in the election campaign in two significant ways—the introduction of religion into politics, and the reduction of political debate to issues largely local to a constituency.

Both the IDA and the PPP were committed "to upholding the high ideals of Islam", with the rightist alliance dominated by the Jamaat promising to amend the Constitution further "to make the Holy Quran the supreme law of Pakistan". Both parties began their meetings with recitations from the holy book, and there were frequent references to the legends and traditions of Islam.

One of these, of course, related to the restrictions placed in Islam on a woman's role in society. With two women—Benazir and her mother Begum Nusrat Bhutto—heading the PPP challenge, inevitably the question arose whether a woman had the right or the capacity to rule in an Islamic society.

Under Zia, women were subjugated in the guise of Islamisation, and forced to modify their role in society. The most discriminatory statute against women related to the law of evidence, with the testimony of two women considered equal to that of a man. Could a woman who cannot bear witness alone in an Islamic court become the prime minister of the country?





Benazir's train to Lahore, headgear in Punjab (right): reclaiming a legacy

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For the Jamaat and other religious leaders, the answer was firmly in the negative. "A woman can be a representative of other women only, not of men," declared Mufti Naimi. At public meetings the Bhutto women were attacked personally and there were derogatory references to Benazir deserting her two-month-old son Bilawal and her home in the quest for power. *O jamalo, ho jamalo, ghar sambhalo, bachcha palo*, went the chant.

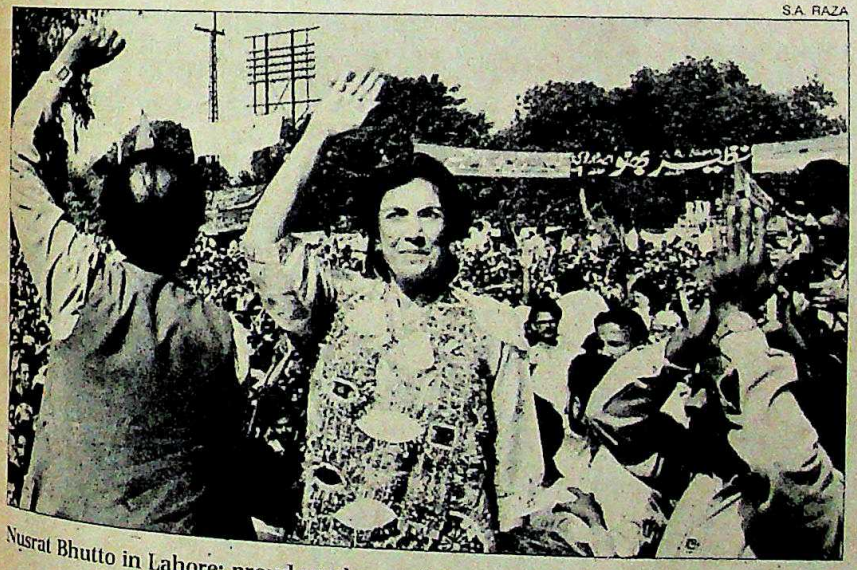
> With two women heading the PPP challenge, inevitably the question arose whether a woman had the right to rule in an Islamic society.

But for a majority of Pakistanis, especially the poor, the fact of Benazir being a woman was not really seen as a disqualification. The multitude which thronged her train on its 1,500-km journey north from Karachi to Rawalpindi via Lahore raised one constant cry, *Vazir-e-Azam, Benazir* (Prime minister, Benazir). In Punjab she also received support from a radical mullah, Maulana Sirajuddin Puri, a PPP candidate, who declared: "The people have no hesitation in accepting a woman as a leader. It is only Zia's touts who are propagating the idea that a woman cannot rule under Islam."

Nusrat Bhutto also made references to early Islamic history in her speeches in support of the woman's right to play a political role in society. The historical figure in question was Bibi Zainab, sister of Prophet Mohammed's martyred grandson Imam Hussain, who went as an emissary to the general, Yazid, after her brother was slain. But for ordinary people not overly concerned with theological debate the issue seemed more simple. "How can a woman be worse than the present rulers, who have looted the people in the name of Islam," asked Mansur Ali, a peasant waiting for Nusrat Bhutto to arrive in Pakpatan town in Punjab. "The poor will accept Benazir, those who hanged Bhutto won't," added Barkat Ali, a former army jawan who lost his right arm in the 1965 Indo-Pak war.

Moreover, women, who constitute roughly 48 per cent of Pakistan's 48 million registered voters, were seen as a major vote bank for the PPP. "Women were crushed in the name of Shariat, but this resulted in greater political awareness among ordinary women," says former PPP senator Aziza Mirza. For poor women especially, being a woman seemed no disqualification for a leader. "A woman gave birth to the Prophet, so why can't a woman also rule the country," asked Alam Bibi, an unemployed leather worker in Lahore. "We are no longer prepared to be deceived in the name of Islam."

S.A. RAZA



Nusrat Bhutto in Lahore: proud mother

In the end, being a woman may in fact have given a tremendous advantage to Benazir over her dour, colourless male opponents. For in the context of popular perceptions in Pakistan today, Bhutto's PPP symbolises the spirit of sacrifice, suffering, redemption and renewal, qualities which a woman appears to represent far more easily than ambitious men who spent the last 11 years serving their own interests.

Benazir's closeness to her father, the trauma of his death, her incarceration in Zia's prisons, her exile and the dispersement of her family, her younger brother Shahnawaz's death, her long struggle against Zia after her return in 1986, have all contributed to the idea of a woman and a leader who has sacrificed her own youth and happiness in the service of a greater cause. The fact that even the birth of a son, the first among the present generation of Bhuttos, and her illness shortly before the elections, did not prevent her from maintaining a hectic campaign schedule further reinforced the idea of struggle and a new beginning.

Benazir has inherited more than just charisma from her father. Intelligent, articulate, strong-willed and attractive, she exudes both tremendous charm and a sense of authority, sending her audience into raptures as she inevitably begins her speeches with "This is your sister standing in front of you". As a public speaker, she displays certain similarities with her father. Her command of Urdu may not be perfect, but her style—confident, even belligerent, yet intimate—keeps the audience engrossed. She is undoubtedly one of the most effective public speakers in Pakistan today, far superior to many of the big IDA leaders ranged against her.

What she lacks is experience and a party organisation which can sustain political work after the excitement of a general election is over. Most of what she has learnt about Pakistan politics has been after her return from exile two years ago. At the same time, many of the old PPP leaders who built the party along with Bhutto—Jatoi, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Mubashir Hasan, Mumtaz Bhutto—have either left or been sidelined. Her critics blame her arrogance (a trait she is seen to share with her father) for her inability to work with senior leaders. But the younger politicians around her maintain that she has trimmed her impetuousness and matured considerably in the last two years. "She is less fiery and less prone to arbitrary decisions, and a more balanced and consummate politician today," says one advisor. Adds Salman Taseer, a PPP Punjab Assembly candidate: "Benazir is the most consensus-minded politician I've seen in this country."

But it is after the elections that Benazir's abilities as a leader will be really tested. During the campaign she rode on

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S.A. RAZA

Punjab chief minister Sharif: dark horse

the crest of a wave, and the consequences of victory or defeat could not impinge on the euphoria around her. It was apparent, though, that she was seeking an alternate image from the radicalism of the past. Both she and her mother appeared conciliatory towards the traditional power centres—the army, the landlords, the bureaucracy and big business. She seemed to lean over backwards to reassure the United States of her good intentions, while in the heat of the campaign she adopted a militant posture against India vis-a-vis Siachen.

BUT after the poll the problems facing the country will acquire a more urgent character. And the people will be looking for answers. "If she wins she'll be faced with an extremely complex situation both internally and externally," observes Akmal Hussain. "And if she loses she'll be obliged to seek a more specific party image, build a credible team around her, and create a grassroots organisation. But with her background Benazir can really help establish democratic norms of functioning."

As the campaign progressed, with Benazir having to fight for every inch with the establishment on issues like the production of identity cards by voters, it was clear that she could hope to form a government only if she got a convincing majority in the 207-member National Assembly. Otherwise, the possibility seemed real that President Ishaq Khan will invite one of the IDA leaders—either Jatoi or Sharif—to form the Government. But in power, with the Senate (akin to the Rajya Sabha) dominated by the Muslim League, Benazir would have to be conciliatory to the Opposition.

In the run-up to the November 16 poll, the PPP clearly enjoyed one advantage over the IDA—in Benazir it had an indisputable leader and potential prime minister. Though reports persisted that Nusrat Bhutto may also covet the top post, the mother's beaming response to the constant cry of "*Vazir-e-Azam Benazir*" seemed to belie the rumours. Only if the army refused a transfer of power unless Nusrat became prime minister was Benazir likely to be kept out.

> In the poll, Bhutto spawned a colourful popular culture. He was reborn in a bewildering variety of representations.

M. RAHMAN

PPP rally: *Zinda hai Bhutto!*

But the IDA presented a picture of chaos and dissension at the top. Former prime minister Junejo seemed out of the race with only a handful of his supporters getting tickets. He was also under pressure trying to save his own seat in Sind. So was Jatoi, though he was considered a likely candidate for prime ministership if the army and the bureaucracy opted for a moderate politician from Sind.

The dark horse was Nawaz Sharif—rich, ambitious, but without a political base, he nevertheless had managed the maximum tickets for his supporters. He was also likely to be backed by the Jamaat, which with 23 candidates among the 172 fielded by the IDA, formed the second largest group in the alliance after Sharif's Muslim League faction. Sharif as prime minister could mean that the present ruling clique in Islamabad would continue to exercise real power while the Jamaat, which has always fared badly in elections but is known to have successfully penetrated the army and the bureaucracy, could further expand its organisational base. But Sharif suffers from the disadvantage of being a Punjabi—with ethnic and regional pressures likely to increase after the poll, particularly in Sind, a prime minister from the dominant Punjab province may be considered a liability.

Besides the ethnic divisions, the new government in Pakistan will be immediately faced with a host of other problems—the breakdown of law and order, the unstable economy and a substantial national debt, the acute lack of public services like health and education, the Afghan problem. "Once the euphoria of a return to democracy is over, the real problems will emerge," says former PPP finance minister Mubashir Hasan. "The issue in Pakistan today is bigger than who will win the election."

The economic crisis has now been transformed into a financial one. Not only has the Government no money to spend on development, but it has very few avenues for raising money. The budget crunch has reached crisis proportions. For the current year, the Government's revenue is estimated at Rs 13,000 crore. But this is entirely consumed by three major expenditures—debt servicing, defence and government salaries. The rest—Rs 6,000 crore for development and Rs 1,400 crore for

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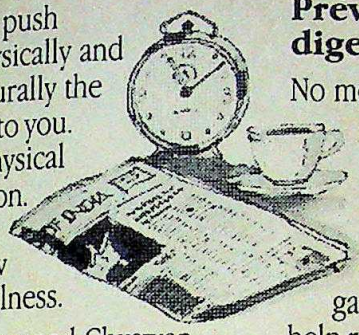

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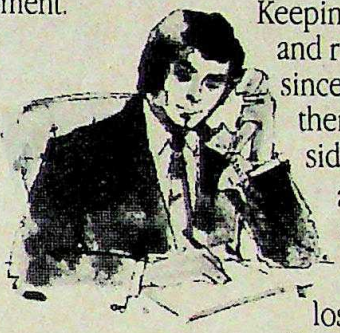

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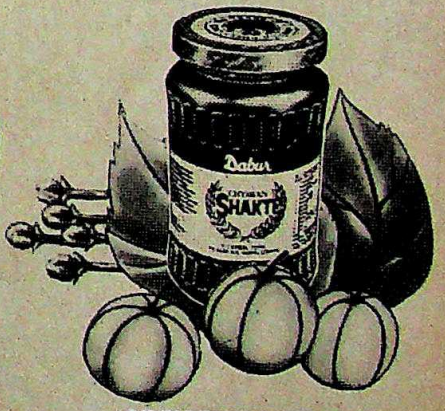

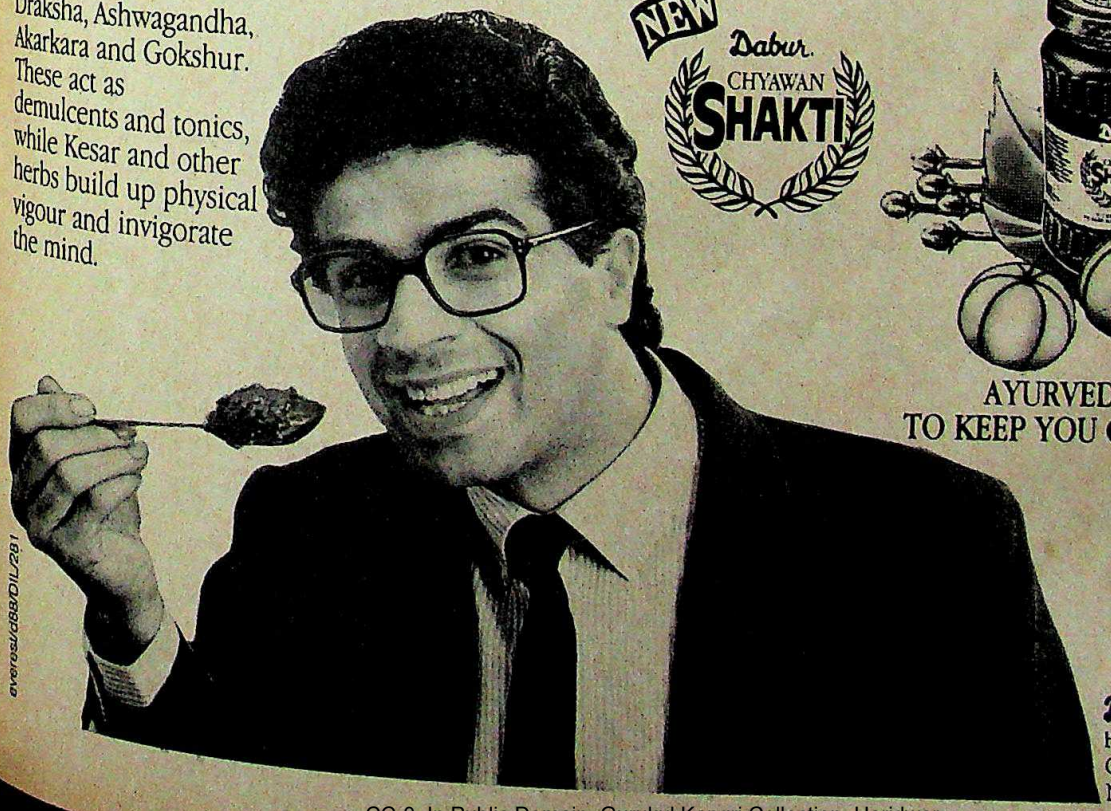

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additional expenditure—has to be met entirely through borrowings.

The level of national savings remains low (just 11 per cent against India's 22 per cent) while the narrow industrial base restricts the Government's ability to raise money through taxes. Foreign remittances have fallen from $3 billion to $2.2 billion, the gap between exports and imports stands at $2 billion and the balance of payments deficit has nearly doubled in the last five years from $558 million to $1.1 billion. With foreign debt at $14 billion and 87 per cent of gross annual aid now going back in the form of debt servicing, Pakistan now needs to negotiate a debt moratorium to ensure that it is not forced to slash its developmental expenditure.

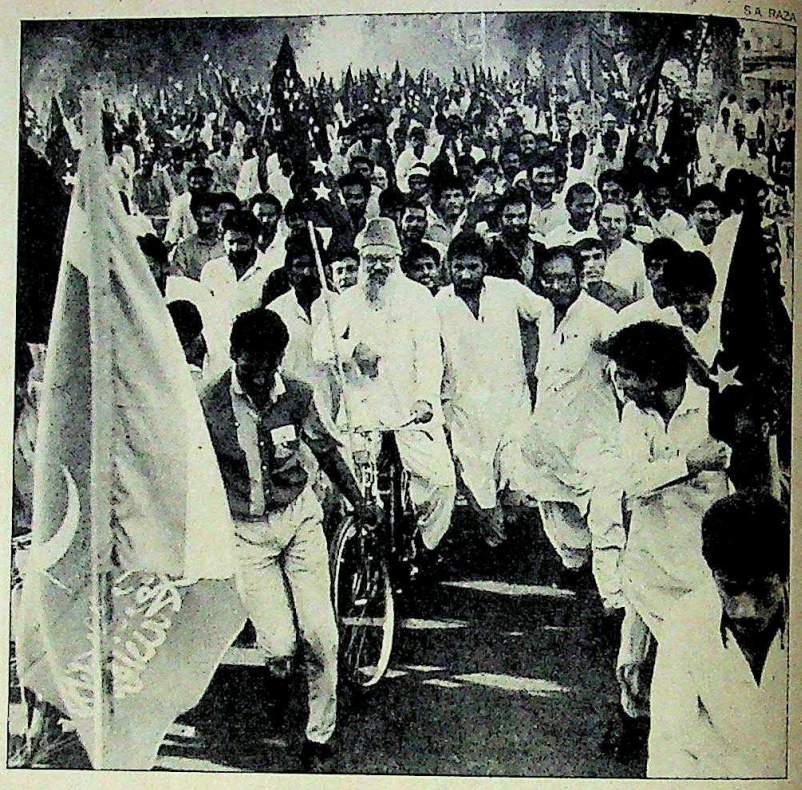
MOREOVER, since 1977 Pakistan has been "eating" its infrastructure, with investment in energy, communications and transport unable to keep pace with growth. "Zia's government looked essentially for short-term survival, and the chickens have finally come home to roost," says an economist. Benazir's lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan puts it more bluntly: "The state is completely bankrupt, and all development programmes will come under the shadow of the heavy debt."

While raising taxes to increase government revenue, the new regime will have to respond to its popular mandate by increasing expenditure on public services like health and education, create more jobs and raise wages, tackle problems like child labour (5 million children at work), malnutrition (40 per cent without a minimum calorie intake) and scarce drinking water (63 per cent of the people are without piped drinking water) and respond at the same time to demands for decentralisation of government and a greater share in revenues for the provinces. Whether the IDA or the PPP forms a government, the task is awesome, and the danger real that after a couple of years of democratic rule a disillusioned electorate may take to the streets once again, this time demanding an ouster of the elected government. In that case, there will be only one option—a take-over by the army. As Ahsan says: "In Pakistan today it is the best time to fight an election but the worst time to form a government."

Neither the PPP nor the IDA look capable of resolving the enormous problems facing Pakistan while retaining the faith of the people in a democratic polity. But the people today are clearly opposed to the idea of another martial law administration. For the present there appears no alternative to a democratically elected government—as Punjab's former strongman Ghulam Mustafa Khar says, there is only one certainty: Pakistan's politicians have to learn now to somehow muddle through.

—M. RAHMAN in Pakistan

S.A. RAZA



IDA rally in Lahore: Jamaat domination

The imprint of the Zia era was evident in the all pervasive presence of religion in electioneering.

PPP meet: religious songs

M. RAHMAN

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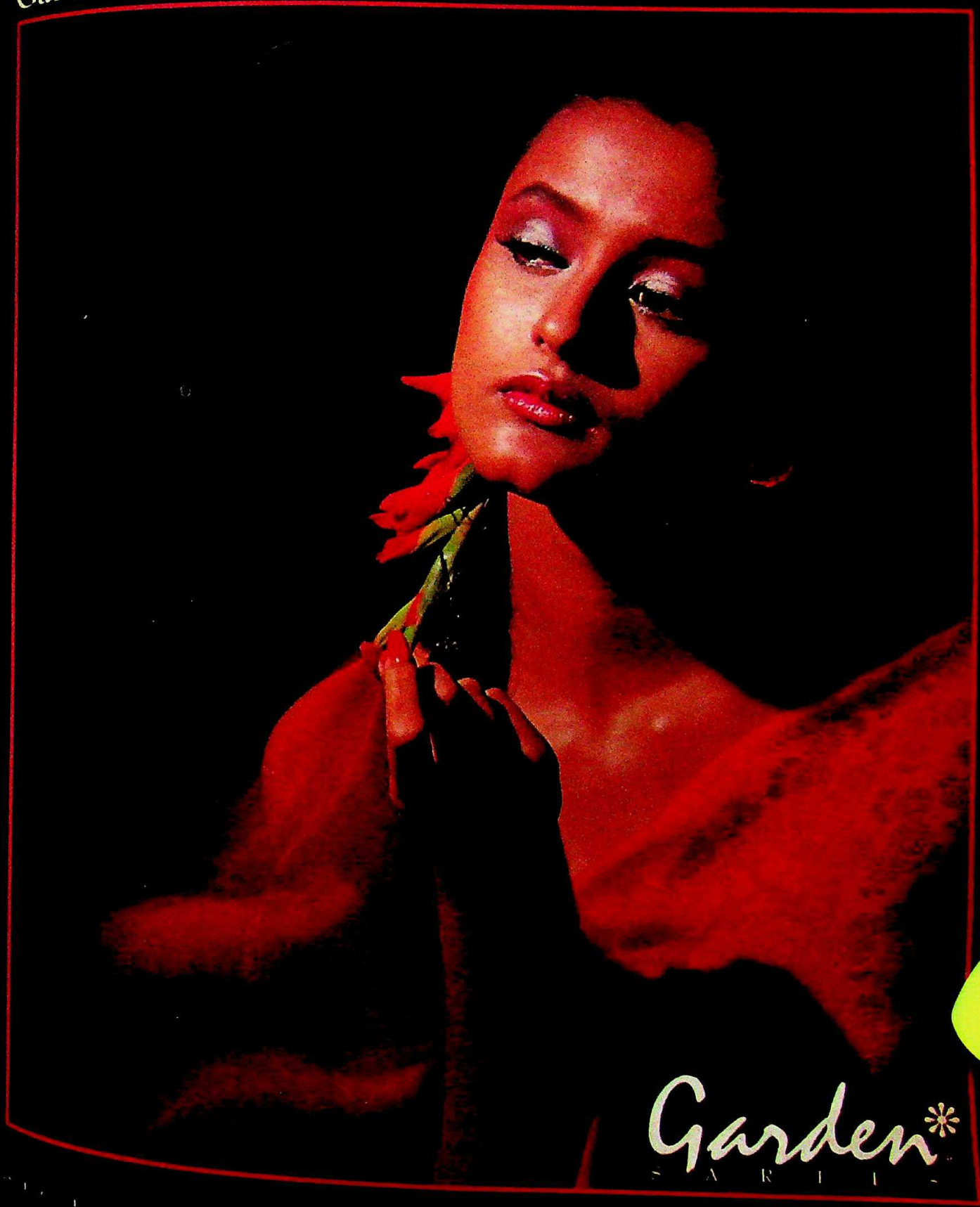

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MALDIVES

A Close Shave

Last fortnight's abortive, comic-book coup attempt in the Maldives, the exotic string of 2,000 coral islands in the Indian Ocean, brought the spotlight on one of the least known parts of the subcontinent. It also gave India an opportunity to re-establish itself as the predominant regional power by rushing in military help as part of the lightning Operation Cactus to save the vulnerable nation. An on-the-spot report:

YOUSSUF Raffiu was working three shifts a day. He is Maldives' top TV producer, film actor, impresario all rolled into one—the Bachchan avatar in a tiny island republic of 1.9 lakh where the craze for Hindi films is matched only by the enthusiasm for 51-year-old President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The nation was preparing for November 11—when Gayoom was to be installed for his third five-year term. Gayoom had asked Raffiu to complete a commemorative teleplay aptly titled *Life is Like That* for screening that day.

Barely halfway through the project, at 4.15 a.m. on November 3, Raffiu was lounging at the TV station when all hell broke lose. "There were guns firing all over. We were so shocked," he says. Within minutes, the presidential palace, barely 100 metres from the sea-front, was under siege. So was the fortress-like headquarters of the National Security Service, the 1400-strong force of Maldivian soldiers-cum-policemen-cum-firefighters. Soon, the 100-odd lungi- and jean-clad Tamil mercenaries also took over the TV and radio stations. They were banking on surprise and on the fact that in tiny Male (population 40,000, area 1.5 sq km)—perhaps the only capital in the world where one can jog coast-to-coast in five minutes—all they needed was control

Photographs by SHEKHAR GUPTA

Maldivian soldier guards breached wall of the National Security Service headquarters

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over the President and communication centres. They'd been well paid—perhaps by people connected with deposed President Abdullah Nasir. But the real lolly lay in securing a transit point for their flourishing drug and gun-running business.

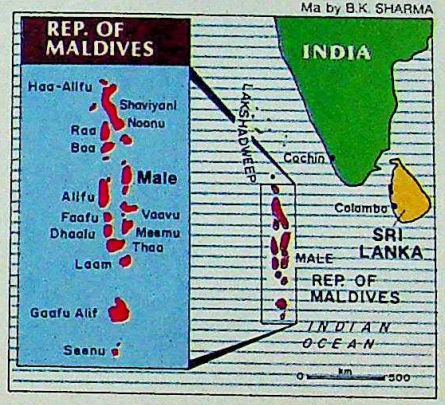
If the attackers had neutralised the telephone exchange and the airport they could have won. But luck wasn't on their side. Their leader, Maldivian smuggler-businessman Abdullah Luthufi managed to reach the president's office, and occupy his chair but Gayoom had vanished.

"I got away in time and was in full control," he said later. But for a long, critical moment all had depended on his escape. He did get away—perhaps even remembering to take his phone-book along. And the first call his Foreign Minister Fathullah Jameel made woke up Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at 5.30 a.m. in New Delhi.

Within minutes, external affairs and defence ministry officials were being roused. Arun Bannerjie, Indian High Commissioner in Male—who was then in Delhi—got a call from his harried secretary who feared an attack on the chancery any moment. At 9 a.m. the prime minister presided over a high-level meeting attended, among others, by the three service chiefs. At noon, the Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs okayed military help for Gayoom and a message was flashed to the Para Brigade in Agra.

By the time the paras, led by Brigadier Farooq Balsara, had begun to plan the operations, naval reconnaissance aircraft were already over Maldives, sending back pictures of the Hulule airstrip which was to be the paras' launching pad. Within six hours of the Cabinet's approval, the first giant Il-76, carrying two companies of paratroopers along with Brigadier Balsara and Bannerjie, rumbled off from the Agra airstrip. Immediately as the engines were cut at Hulule, the rear hatch of the Ilyushin opened, disgorging the paras and their jeep-mounted recoilless guns.

Map by B.K. SHARMA



The troops took position around the airstrip but there was no resistance. The attackers had fled on hearing over BBC that Indian forces were coming. At this stage Bannerjie surveyed the Male skyline and saw a ship steaming away in a hurry. Acting quickly, the troops moved a recoiless gun to the edge of the waterfront and opened fire with machine-guns as well. But the ship—loaded with cases of Black Label whisky and cigarettes from Male's duty-free shops which had been hijacked at gunpoint—got away, along with 27 hostages, leaving behind 19 dead in Male. The hostages included prominent Maldivians like transport minister Ahmed Mujutuba and his Swiss wife Ursula. The troops first task, however, was to reach and clear up Male. Said a veteran paratrooper: "Not since we reached Dhaka in 1971 had I seen so much gratitude in peoples' eyes."

With the army and the IAF securing Male, it was the navy's turn to nab the marauders in a film-like chase across the high seas. While Brigadier Balsara and his paratroopers helplessly watched the fleeing ship *Progress Light* fade away, beyond the reach of their guns, Naval Headquarters were already talking to INS *Godavari*, sailing more than 1,000 km away from the ship. Captain S.V. Gopalachari was in a hurry to get back home. His ship had already been away for 82 days and he wanted to be back for his wife's birthday on November 8. But the message from headquarters changed his plans abruptly.

On one of its first few sorties, an Il-38 maritime reconnaissance aircraft from the navy's airbase INS *Hansa* in Goa spotted a suspicious-looking ship. "Generally, the ship seemed headed towards Singapore. But it was listing a little," said an officer. The pilot made a low pass and the ship changed course abruptly, confirming the suspicions. It then veered

Coup leader Luthufi and President Gayoom: close call

The attackers could have made it if they had taken care to neutralise the telephone exchange and the airport.

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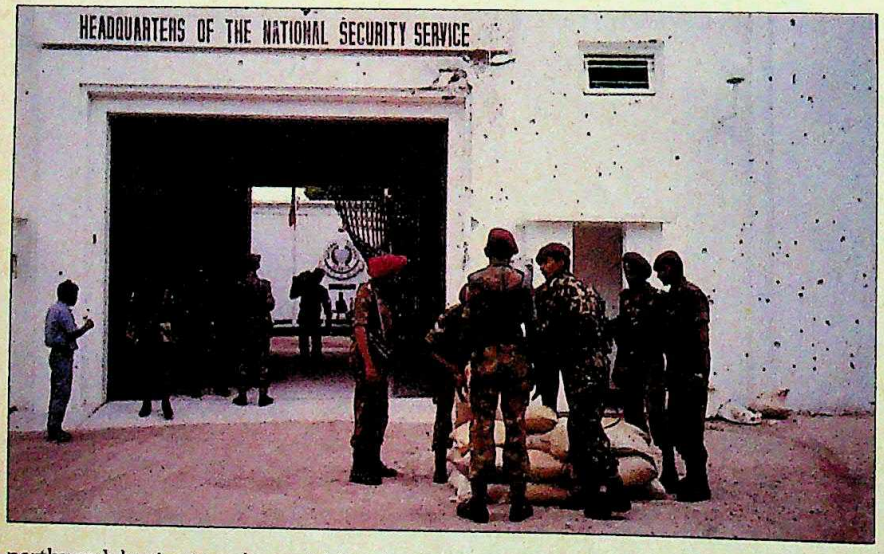

Six hours after the Cabinet gave its approval, the first IAF transports rumbled off from Agra airbase carrying fully armed para-troopers and High Commissioner Arun Kumar Bannerjie, all tensed up for action.

IAF transport and crews at Hulule (top) and troops defusing a grenade

northwards hoping to make a quick break for the closest place, Sri Lanka *(see sketch)*.

Such hopes were short-lived. The Il-38s ran a relentless relay, flying in tight circles around the getaway ship, the odd gap in surveillance being filled by the navy's latest acquisition, the giant TU-142M reconnaissance aircraft. The aircraft followed the expanding square system. This involves pinpointing a likely location of the target on the map and then reconnoitering the area in expanding squares till it is located. Once traced by the Il-38 sensors, *Progress Light* was never lost. On the afternoon of November 5, the training frigate INS *Betwa* and the guided missile frigate *Godavari*, latched on to it.

"The first radio contact was made on the shippers' channel 16 when we were still several miles away," recalls Gopalachari, overall commander of the operation on high seas. The mercenaries warned him to stay at least six miles away and threatened to kill the hostages if he came any closer. Since *Progress Light* only moved at six knots, the Indian ships had no real problem keeping it tightly hemmed in even at a distance of two to three miles. Their main worry was that the mercenaries would get away on a faster speedboat which, at that range, could have easily come in from the Sri Lankan shore.

Around midnight, patience on both sides began to run out. The warships closed in to a distance of a little over a mile; the mercenaries retaliated by dragging two hostages, Abdul Rehman and Abdul Sattar, to the bridge and blowing their heads away. For effect, their bodies were

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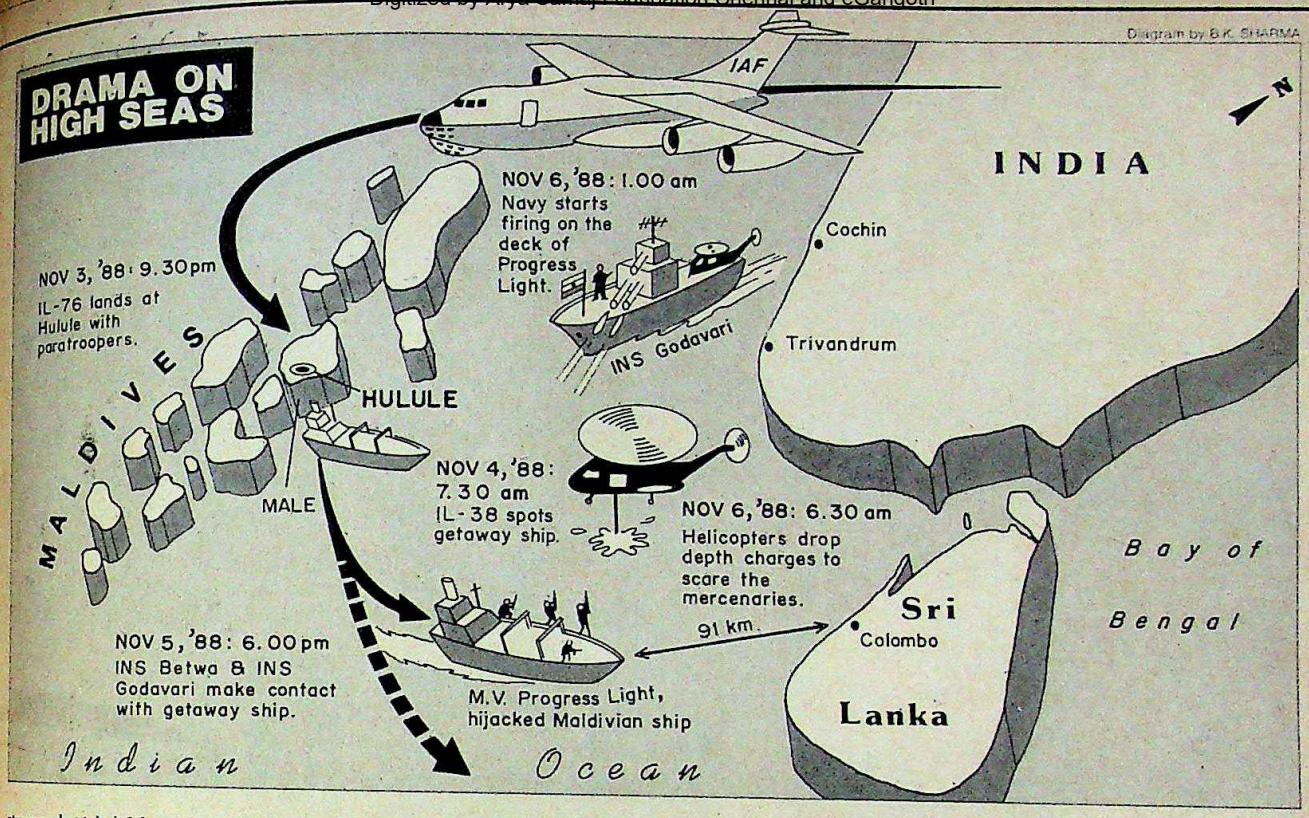

strapped with lifebuoys and thrown into the sea in the hope that the gruesome sight would deter their pursuers. But, if anything, it only convinced them of the need for drastic action.

Channel 16 crackled with static again and *Godavari* told *Progress Light* that unless it stopped dead and surrendered, firing would begin. Says Gopalachari: "We told them we would start scaring them." But the mercenaries pressed on and then the Indian Navy opened up in right earnest. One of the first shells from the 30 mm anti-aircraft cannons broke the swinging derryck on *Progress Light*, prising away the ship's speedboat and, with it, the marauders' only hope of escape. The *Godavari*'s 57 mm and *Betwa*'s 4.5-inch guns now fired all around the escaping ship. "Shrapnel flew all over and at this point the mercenaries had begun to panic," recalls V.A. Vincent, the Guruvayur-born second officer of *Progress Light*. But the mercenaries were still not giving up.

Psychological warfare climaxed at first light. *Godavari*'s Sea King helicopter made several passes over *Progress Light*, dropping anti-submarine depth charges. The concussing bangs did not damage the ship but bounced it rudely, completely shaking the mercenaries' morale. This was supplemented by a display of fire-power by the shore-based Alizes.

So great was the panic that at least three mercenaries jumped into the water for a suicidal tryst with the sharks. Unfortunately the shrapnel killed four hostages too, somewhat blotting the navy's book. "That was unavoidable," said a Maldivian member of the negotiating team on board *Godavari*, "when we looked at the cost-benefit ratio, this price had to be paid." Luthufi finally decided to give up. He was asked to line up all the hostages to the foc'sle and then collect his own men, placing them in such a way that sharpshooters atop the Indian ship had a clear field of fire to the mercenaries. "Once that was done the process of retrieving the hostages began," says Gopalachari. Boats were lowered and the fit hostages asked to jump in. The others were picked up later, along with the mercenaries.

As the Sea Kings lifted the wounded to Trivandrum, Maldivian and Indian officers on board *Godavari* and *Betwa* began interrogating the mercenaries. For the Indians, the revelations were shell-shocking. Luthufi and his lieutenant Shagar Nasir confirmed that their storm-troopers had been contributed entirely by Uma Maheswaran's People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, a group backed by the Indian Peace Keeping Force in its campaign against the LTTE.

Later, cowering in the shadow of a carbine-toting marine commando on board *Godavari*, Luthufi told INDIA TODAY: "Uma Maheswaran approached me in my poultry farm near Colombo and asked me to take over the country." But did he expect that such fairy-tale piracy would succeed in this age? He shot back with incredible chutzpah: "Why not? Anyone can be the President of such a country. If only luck had been with us. If only the Indian troops had not come for a few more hours..."

Back in New Delhi, the Indian troops were being complimented for denying Luthufi and his hordes just that slice of luck. The efficiency with which the Indian forces were able to reach Male, over 589 km away from the Indian coast, brought international appreciation and also a few awed comments. The British press went to town about India displaying its newly-acquired military muscle. And by staying out of the melee, even the US—which has its Diego Garcia base less than 600 km away—acknowledged India's growing role as a relatively benign regional gendarme.

Tactically, Operation Cactus was a source of enormous satisfaction for Indian defence planners. Besides the quick reaction, the key elements were inter-service coordination and the IAF's ability to rapidly establish and maintain the Male air bridge from southern Indian bases. "Basically," said a senior IAF officer, "this operation was intrinsically different from Jaffna." There the planes had to hop just 50 km. Here the distance was more than 600 km. By displaying the ability to

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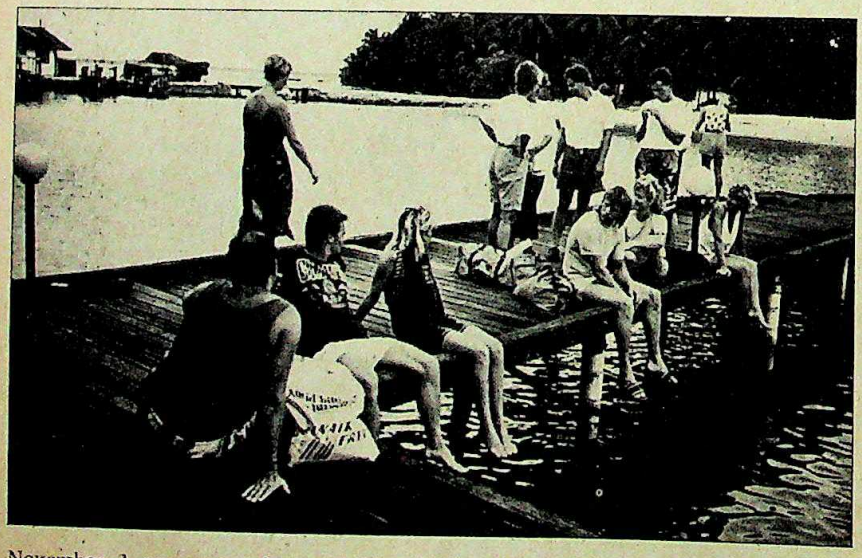
maintain a large garrison so far away, the IAF has proved that the massive investment recently made in its transports was bearing fruit. "If any future enemy watched the IAF's performance here, he would be very worried," said a senior army officer. The IAF was making the best of the opportunity. Two days after the initial flurry—the night of November 3 saw more than a 100 transports land at Hulule—the air force began its learning process by reconnoitering the area. Even a detachment of Mirage 2000 fighters visited the island for "familiarisation".

While for much of the world Maldives may be merely a lost, exotic tourist land (last year's tourist arrivals exceeded 1.3 lakh), for the subcontinent it is of vital importance. The islets straddle the most important trade routes leading to the subcontinent, also providing the only stopping point between India and Diego Garcia. Moreover, Pakistan has constantly wooed the Islamic nation.

Significantly, unlike the messy Sri Lankan experience, this operation was free of casualties—except for a jawan who accidentally shot himself in the foot. Also, unlike in Sri Lanka, there is total support for the Indian role among Maldivians. So complete was their gratitude that—while all shops and offices were closed—the Government not only ordered the opening of the duty-free shops complex exclusively for Indian troops, but also waived passport and dollar requirements. The evening *Godavari* brought back the hostages to an emotional welcome by Gayoom and his military band, he ordered the reopening of duty-free shops for the soldiers at 10 in the night. But veterans realise that goodwill in such endeavours is governed strictly by the law of diminishing returns. Just one unpleasant incident can spoil it all. Accordingly, the troops withdrawal began within two days of their induction.

The Maldivians are now getting inured to rumours of coups. They claim to feel reassured, that if things go wrong again support will come quickly and effectively. A few hundred Indian troops may remain as a training-cum-support force. But it is inevitable that, chastened by last fortnight's experience—when the nation was held to ransom by a hundred dogs of war—Maldives will beef up its own military. "The saddest part is that my country has been robbed of its innocence," said Khathma Dawson, the comely, Britain-educated Male newsreader, adding: "Just the fact that the fighting and the killing was for real is so shocking."



Relieved hostages (top); and tourists at Kunmba village resort

The Maldivians' dilemma is cruel: how to enter the 20th century politically while retaining the almost prehistoric idyll that makes their islands such a paradise.

Led by Gayoom, who was triumphantly sworn in for his third term last fortnight, the Maldivians now face a cruel dilemma: how to enter the 21st century politically, while retaining the almost prehistoric idyll that makes their islands such a tourist paradise. Or how to maintain Maldives as the tourist brochures promise it should be: "A land where we teach you the art of doing nothing," and yet sleep peacefully at night. —SHEKHAR GUPTA in Male

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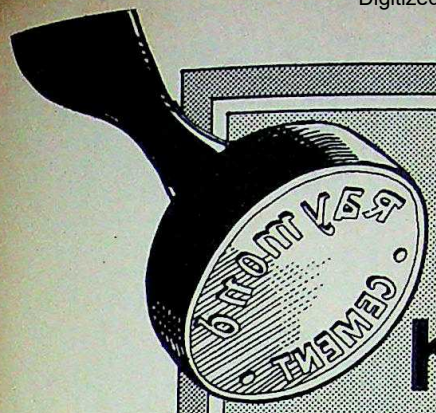

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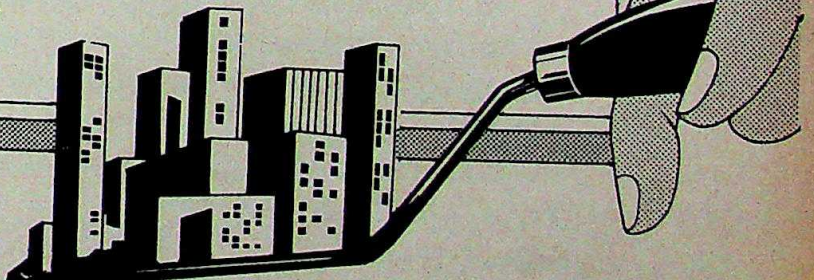

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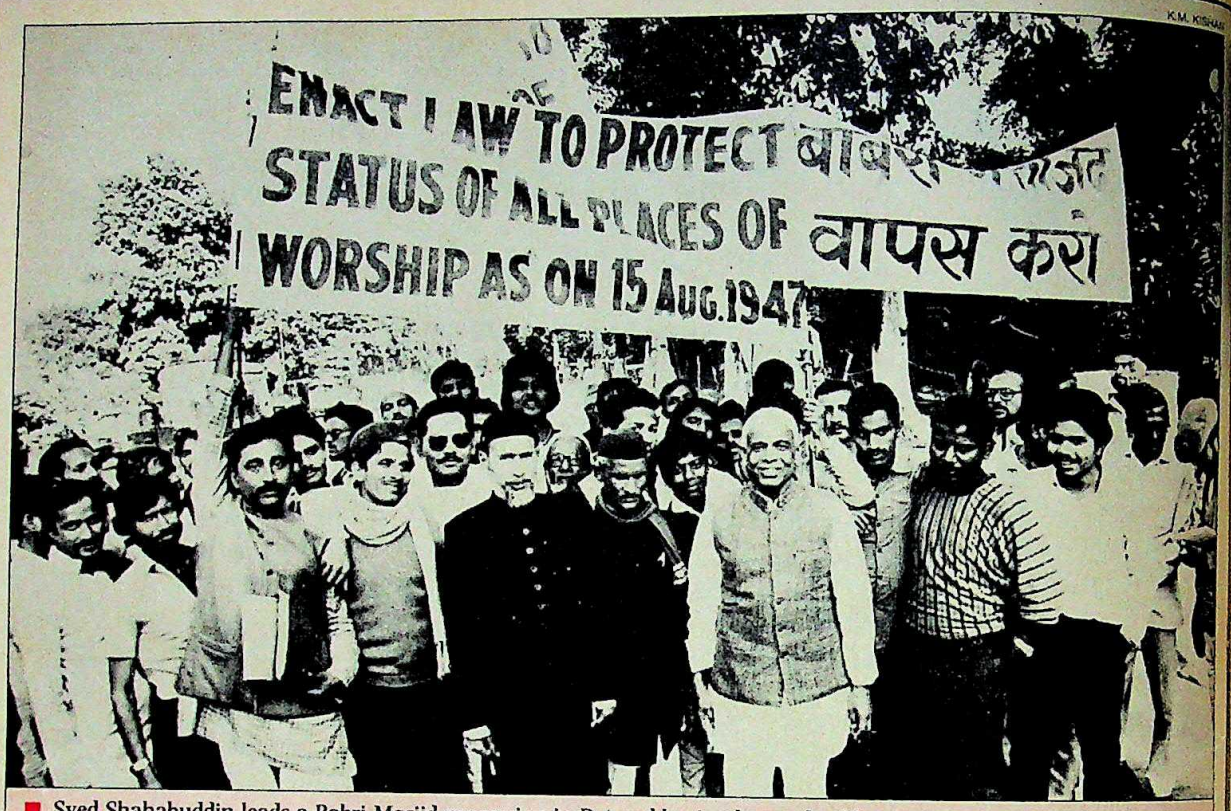

■ Syed Shahabuddin leads a Babri Masjid procession in Patna: blowing hot and cold

COMMUNALISM

Stirring the Cauldron

The communal card has always played a key role in our electioneering, but has never enjoyed the blatant currency it is beginning to now. The lust for vote has obscured all good sense, and the Ayodhya controversy is being wrung for all it is worth. While the Congress(I) is indulging in criminal inertia, Hindu and Muslim organisations are rolling up their sleeves in preparation for another bloodbath.

AYODHYA, land of no-war, which in recent times has become the battleground for fundamentalist buccaneering, saw Hindu-Muslim belligerence reach a point of no return last fortnight as the shadows of the 1989 general elections fell across the once-hallowed land. With communal violence ravaging several areas of Uttar Pradesh, and even engulfing the hitherto peaceful Faizabad, 10 km from Ayodhya, the message being beamed became quite clear: that the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue is now totally in the realm of vote-politics, and no objective settlement of the problem appears possible.

And as the communal fire spread unquelled by the Government, leaders of Hindu organisations vowed to not only demolish the Babri Masjid and build a magnificent Rama temple at the spot, but also renewed their call to liberate two other holy shrines—Krishna Janmabhoomi at Mathura and Kashi-Vishwanath temple at Varanasi—which form the religion's sacred trinity.

Their Muslim counterparts, spearheading a legal and political war to defend the disputed properties, retaliated by pledging to face the challenge. Behind the do-or-die determination of the warring groups is visible not only religious sentiment, but also the lust for vote, a craving which has reduced almost all the political parties, especially the Congress(I), to dangerous levels of inertia. Faced with the

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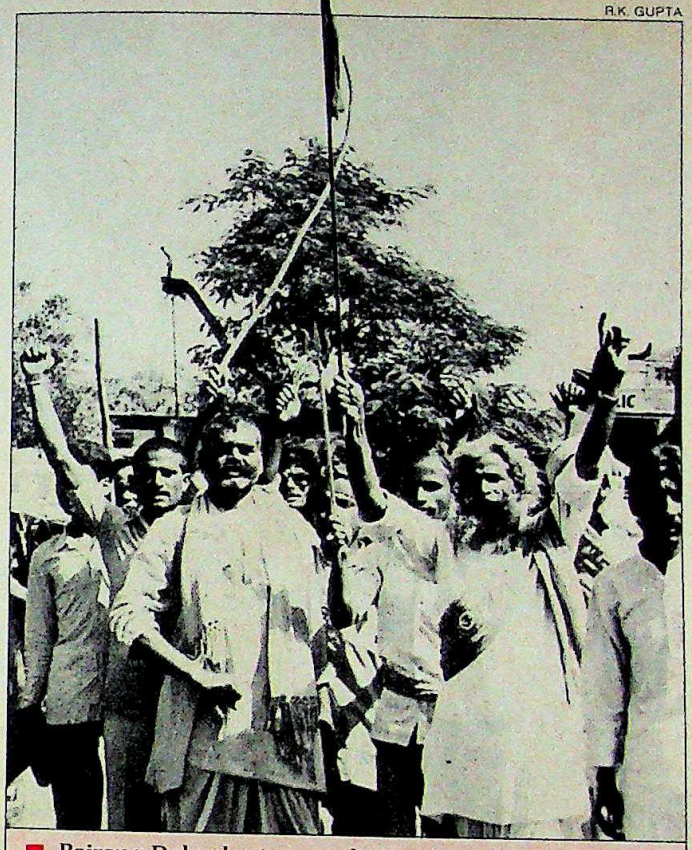
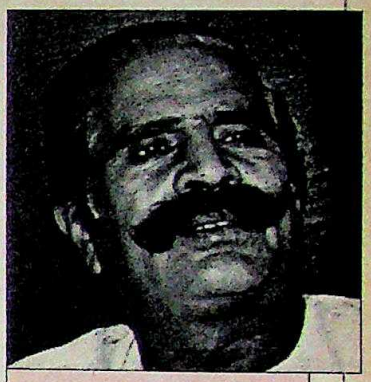
"In at least the Hindi belt, Muslims will vote for only those who have a clear stand on the Babri Masjid issue."

M. AFZAL
editor, Urdu weekly Akhbar-e-Nau

R.K. GUPTA



■ Bajrang Dal volunteers gather at the Ayodhya Yagna



"We have decided to create a strong Hindu vote bank on our demands. Only those who support these will get our votes."

B.L. SHARMA
general secretary, Indraprastha Vishwa Hindu Parishad

prospect of offending either of their communal vote banks on the eve of elections, the ruling party refuses to act to defuse an explosive situation.

TRAGICALLY, the dispute leaders too are playing the same game: not counting the lives lost in the communal violence, but evaluating the votes they can now command. Says M. Afzal, the young, fiery editor of the Delhi-based Urdu weekly *Akhbar-e-Nau:* "Everybody seems to be convinced that it is the Congress(I) which is playing vote-politics. It tried to appease Muslim sentiments over the Shah Bano case by offering them the Muslim women bill and to please the majority community it gave them the Babri Masjid. In at least the Hindi belt, Muslims will vote for only those who have a clear stand on the Babri Masjid issue." Ashok Singhal, leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and of the Ram Janmabhoomi Yagna Samiti, made more explicit the dilemma faced by the Congress(I): "Everything is based on religious faith and this issue is bound to split every political party before the next polls."

The attempts to communalise the forthcoming polls were further evident when Indraprastha Vishwa Hindu Parishad General Secretary B.L. Sharma told INDIA TODAY: "We have now decided to create a strong (Hindu) vote bank on our seven-point demand and only those who would support and work for these demands would get these votes." The VHP has decided to draft the services of sadhus, sants and dharmacharyas, who can influence the Hindu mind, to organise symposia, seminars and discourses across the country on the demands, which include: determination to protect the sanctity of Hindu shrines and reclaim Ram Janmabhoomi, Krishna Janmabhoomi and Kashi-Vishwanath temples; common civil code; removal of special privileges and status to minorities; Central legislation to ban cow slaughter; repeal of Article 370 of the Constitution, which grants special status to Jammu & Kashmir; a stop to the acquisition of Hindu sacred places; and to press for the use of foreign funds for the purposes they have been received by various organisations.

The VHP leaders are telling the Hindu masses that if Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi are taken away from their lives nothing will remain. The Muslims on the other hand feel that though the Babri Masjid has no special religious significance for them, it symbolises the designs of Hindu chauvinists to usurp their shrines and destroy their identity. Says Uttar Pradesh Babri Masjid Action Committee (UPBMAC) Convenor Zafaryab Jilani: "The Babri Masjid surely is not our Mecca but if we lose this mosque to Hindus, the already oppressed minority community will lose whatever little reason they have to be the citizens of this country." In precisely the same vein, illustrating the intractability of the situation, says Uttar Pradesh VHP President, S.C. Dixit, a former chief of the state police: "If we lose something as important to the Hindu faith as the Ram Janmabhoomi to the Muslims, it would mean that the days are numbered for the majority community in this country."

The recent communal frenzy which rocked Uttar Pradesh and created panic throughout north India, was an expression of this fear and of the state of inertia that the Government has been pushed into through its acquiescence in communal politics. It was also an ominous augury of what is likely to happen if the Government does not act to settle the issue. It began with the Babri Masjid Coordination Committee headed by Syed Shahabuddin deciding to organise an Ayodhya march on October 14 to offer en

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■ Scene of arson in Faizabad town: administrative lapses

R.K. GUPTA

FAIZABAD

Ominous Threshold

THE communal riots in Faizabad last month herald the breach of another tolerance threshold. For four years this town, adjacent to Ayodhya, had remained free of violence, though other places had burned. Even when the locks of the disputed temple were opened on February 1, 1986—leading to rioting in 24 Uttar Pradesh districts—Faizabad remained tension free.

With the violence abated, Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari has done the expected—called for an administrative inquiry into the riots. Preliminary information with state agencies reveals that the violence was engineered and not a

masse "namaz" in the disputed shrine. To counter this the Hindus announced a five-day-long "Shri Rama Maha Yagna" in the same town from October 11. Frighteningly, the Government permitted the VHP and the Ram Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti to go ahead with their programme.

In a mammoth turn-out, over a lakh VHP and samiti supporters gathered there from October 13, a day before the proposed march, and remained on guard in the town till October 15. Had the Muslim leaders from various towns gone ahead with the march, the result would have been mayhem. Not only were Bajrang Dal volunteers present there in large numbers, wielding trishuls, swords and spears, but even Adivasis from Bihar stood armed with deadly bows and arrows. Jilani, of the Action Committee asserts that such a congregation could never have been possible without the Government's connivance. Similarly, the leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, Satyapal Singh Yadav, declares: "The Congress is hell-bent on exploiting Hindu votes because it feels that it can win the next elections by doing so." The BJP group leader in the Assembly, Kalyan Singh, warns: "The Congress is committing yet another tragic miscalculation by thinking it would muster the support of the Hindus by delaying the issue. They should hand over the Ram Janmabhoomi to Hindus without any delay in order to win them over."

THE fact is that any games the Government plays is bound to be costly in terms of human lives. Though on October 12 Union Home Minister Buta Singh and state Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari held discussions with members of the Babri Masjid Coordination Committee and cajoled them into calling off their march, the anticipatory tension had already led to violence causing almost 40 deaths, and the situation had become so communally surcharged that Dussehra had to be celebrated under red-alert in 37 sensitive districts.

And Shahabuddin, as is his manner, having blown hot was now blowing cold: "We have no reason to think the Government will renege on its commitment to expedite the judicial process as promised by Buta Singh, if the issue is not settled through negotiation. We are not in a hurry. We only desire a peaceful solution, short of surrendering the mosque to the Hindus." Interestingly leaders from both religions reveal that they have been employing threatening tactics without real intent to defile: that the Ayodhya march was intended to draw government attention and not to actually offer "namaz" in the disputed shrine; and that the counter-threat by Hindus to recite the Hanuman Chalisa at the Jama Masjid was only intended to convey that they too could go to any extent.

But the Government was not even beginning to react. The fact is that there exists little hope for a negotiated settlement. Hindu leaders like Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh chief Balasaheb Deoras, Singhal and others have rejected this suggestion, and when Buta Singh held a meeting with leaders of the Ram Janmabhoomi Yagna Samiti on September 1, he was told: "The question of Janmabhoomi is not negotiable." Even so, Buta Singh told the Coordination Committee that he was hopeful. The Union home minister, unable to act impartially, is obviously trying to buy time and keep the issue pending till next year's elections.

Buta Singh had initiated negotiations on June 30 last year after the massive rally by Muslims at the Boat Club since it was beginning to be clear that Muslims, the traditional Congress(I) vote bank, were poised to break away from the party. Muslim MPs met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi last year and discussed the political fall-out of the controversy. Soon after, according to Tariq Anwar, MP, Rajiv asked Buta to take immediate salvaging steps. Not quite to settle the problem, but to ensure that their constituency of votes did not suffer. Buta later called a meeting of Muslim MPs of the Congress(I) to discuss the matter. Says Anwar: "There was a feeling among the party MPs that the controversy was taking a political colour because the Babri movement leaders were politically motivated in their actions." He suggested an all-party committee be set up so that vested interests could not politicise the issue and then blame the Congress(I) for any foul-up. But Buta kept trying to negotiate, hopeful of a solution.

Now, in any case, all facades have been dropped. The Hindu leaders have made clear their plans to create a Hindu vote bank, and Muslim leaders, even sober Urdu newspapers, have adopted the same tone. The Urdu weekly *Al-Jamiat* (Delhi) recently called upon the Muslims to unite and *Nai Duniya*, another Urdu weekly, edited by Shahid Siddiqui in its September 30 issue quoted a Muslim leader Ashfaque Hussain to say that there was a plan to finish the Muslims politically by both Congress(I) and opposition parties.

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result of provocation as initially made out by the administration. It seems fundamentalists planned to create trouble and the administration's underestimation of their designs worsened matters.

The sequence of events shows how easily the riots were ignited. The district administration, the Hindus and the Muslims had put their heads together and chalked out a schedule for the religious functions to be held on October 21. Accordingly, the *milad* of the Muslims in the Wazirganj locality—which falls on the customary route of the Hindus' *Bharat milap* procession—was to conclude by 9 a.m., so that the Hindu procession could go through at 9:30. Though the schedule was decided upon, the district administration did not bother to implement it—under the circumstances, an unpardonable act of carelessness. Consequently, the *milad* had not even started and Muslims were still assembling when the *Bharat milap* procession reached the spot, also before schedule.

The scene was perfect for a communal confrontation. Someone in the Hindu procession sparked off trouble by tearing down a Muslim banner, and fetched immediate retaliation in the form of a hurled bomb. The heavy police posse proved inadequate, and an half hour of brick-batting followed. The rumour mills began to grind. At the Chowk locality where the *milap* procession culminates, Hindus had gathered in large numbers. On hearing of the Wazirganj incident, they went on a rampage, setting fire to shops and rickshaws. Muslims retaliated. Several stabbings took place till about 11.30 p.m., when indefinite curfew was clamped. The administration's criminal negligence was evident in the fact that a mere dozen odd policemen were present at the Chowk locality. The violence continued for three days, leaving five dead.

With tension still gripping 37 communally sensitive towns in the state, the Babri Masjid Action Committee is again getting into the act. On October 31, committee Chairman Muzzaffar Husain Kachauchavi announced that if the Government did not contain the situation by November 25, the Muslims would start preparations to deal with the police themselves. The chairman alleges the police are responsible for the communal violence in Faizabad and Bahraich (October 26). More trouble certainly seems in the offing.

—DILIP AWASTHI

The Congress(I) is obviously worried. The issue stands politicised and Muslims seem to be drifting away from them. The results of the Allahabad by-election were a warning signal. Mass desertion of Muslim voters in the country's largest state where two crore of the country's 12 crore Muslims reside, could be fatal for the ruling party, affecting the party's electoral prospects in Bihar too. Shahabuddin, who heads one faction of the coordination committee, has been meeting Rajiv and Buta frequently and their softened stand towards him has given rise to the impression that the Congress(I) might thus try to keep angry Muslim votes from going to the Opposition.

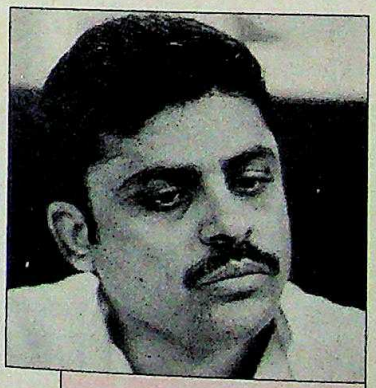
But with the Government sitting on the fence in the controversy, things are beginning to look grim. The warring communities are girding for a frontal confrontation. The UPBMAC, demoralised over the decision of the Shahabuddin-controlled coordination committee to postpone the Ayodhya march, has called a two-day All India Babri Masjid Conference on November 26 in New Delhi to finalise another date for the march. Meanwhile, the VHP has convened a congregation of religious heads from all over the country at Ayodhya from January 28 next year. Says Dixit: "If the Government fails to act till next Ram Navmi which falls in April we will start the construction of a big temple after demolishing the so-called mosque the same day." There is the inevitable counter-threat from Azam Khan: "There is no question of backing out now. Either we undertake the march regardless of consequences or leave the Muslims at the mercy of the majority community."

Undoubtedly, Muslim votes have polarised on the Babri issue, at least in north India. But the question is: Can the Opposition exploit this to their advantage? Chances are they are playing it safe with an eye to the votes as is the Congress(I). But things are not so simply solved for the ruling party. Even if they give up the Muslim bank and play a majority-wooing card, it is likely to boomerang since the BJP has already staked its claim in that electorally fertile area.

But by trying to straddle the communal fence, the Congress (I) leadership is only adding fuel to the fire. In the end, it will only have itself to blame. By not taking a tough stand three years ago when the confrontational issue first surfaced, the ruling party is clearly responsible for letting the situation get out of hand.

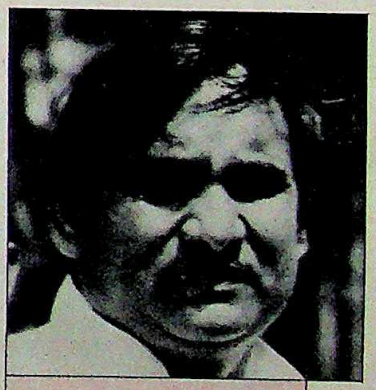
The tragedy is that it is not the ruling party alone that is to blame. For decades, political parties of all hues have pandered to communal forces. Even V.P. Singh was accused of playing the communal card in the Allahabad by-elections. With even the so-called progressive parties hostage to communal politics, it is little wonder that communalism has now become a Frankenstein-like monster that now controls its creators. Nothing could be more dangerous or destructive.

—FARZAND AHMED and DILIP AWASTHI



"Party MPs felt the issue was taking a political colour because the Babri leaders were politically motivated."

TARIQ ANWAR
Congress(I), MP



"The Congress is hell bent on exploiting Hindu votes because it feels it can win the next elections by doing so."

SATYAPAL SINGH YADAV
opposition leader, U.P. Assembly

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NEHRU CENTENARY

Sacrificial Sackings

Reshuffle in the high-level committee raises eyebrows

BUREAUCRATIC and ministerial reshuffles have been a dime a dozen during the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi. But one recent high-level reorganisation that caught the public's fancy last fortnight occurred within the Implementation Committee for the Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary Celebrations.

The committee, with a planned Rs 45-crore budget, is part of the Cabinet Secretariat. Its job is to design programmes that will commemorate Nehru and ingrain him into the public's conscience even as the nation hurtles on to its tryst with the 21st century. So far, the committee has been known better for organised gimmicks such as the Freedom Run and the re-enactment of the Dandi Salt March.

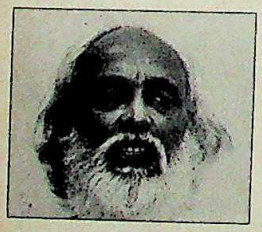
So what came as the prize surprise in the reorganisation was the roll of one of the biggest heads—and the brain behind the committee's publicity stunts—Romi Chopra, 45, the dapper, balding and bearded friend and former Doon Schoolmate of Rajiv. Chopra, an advertising executive, is regularly seen by the side of the prime minister or his family at public as well as private functions. His elevation to quasi-officialdom, as a member of a key governmental committee responsible for both patronage as well as publicity during a political year, had sharpened criticism about Rajiv's penchant for coterie politics.

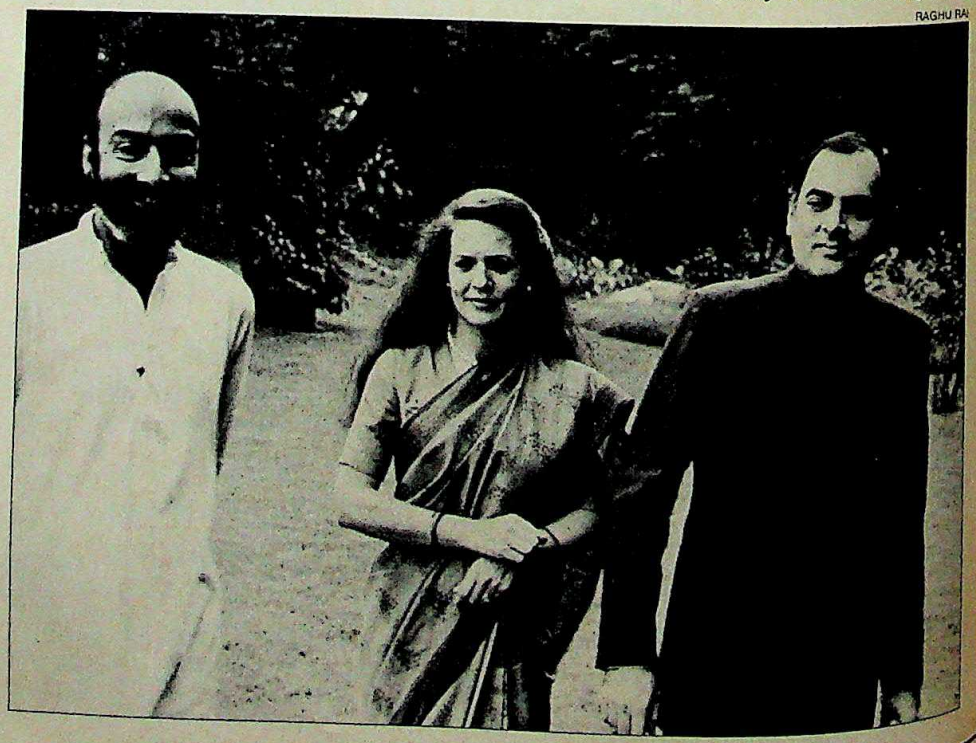
The reorganisation of the implementation committee was announced in a circular signed by the cabinet secretary. Others who were removed along with Chopra included former culture czar Vardarajan who also served as the committee's secretary, Delhi's Lt-Governor Romesh Bhandari, and communications whiz-kid Sam Pitroda. Replacements included Ravinder Kumar, director of the Jawaharlal Nehru Museum; N.D. Jayal, the noted environmentalist; and Arun "Bunny" Nanda, the Bombay-based proprietor of Rediffusion, an ad agency whose services were used extensively in Rajiv's 1984 campaign. Those continuing on the body include chairman Sheila Dixit; Jitendra Prasad, a former AICC general secretary and veteran parliamentarian; General Narendra Kumar; and Yogesh Chandra who is now its seniormost bureaucrat.

> Chopra, Pitroda, Bhandari and, later, Vardarajan favoured what the rival group described as the "tamasha" approach—freedom runs and pep rallies.

One theory advanced for the reshuffle was that the implementation committee members were trying to force all public sector undertakings and government departments to purchase a commemorative diary sponsored by the committee. But a spokesman for the committee denied this.

It is indeed a fact that the National Committee (the umbrella body headed by the President of India and consisting of 300 members including freedom fighters, chief ministers and key opposition members) has approved the concept of a diary and pocketbook. The implementation committee, the working adjunct of the national body, had the item designed by Preeti Vyas and put together by an ad agency, Sistas, for Rs 7 lakh. It has ordered some 15,000 copies which will each be sold commercially for Rs 250. Explained





RAGHU RAI

(From top) Vardarajan; Bhandari; Pitroda; Chopra with the Gandhis: dropped

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the spokesman: "All government undertakings were going in for different Nehru designs this year. So we came up with what we thought was the best. I think for the price, this one is a steal."

Closer home is the fact that the prime minister and his image are being given a face lift at every level of the Government. And it probably needed one at this high-level committee. Originally, it was chaired by Amitabh Bachchan, but he resigned last May following publicity about his financial dealings. From the start, the committee was riven by in-fighting between two distinct groups favouring starkly different approaches on how to commemorate Nehru's legacy.

Chopra, Pitroda, Bhandari and, later, Vardarajan favoured what the rival group described as the "tamasha" approach—freedom runs, fancy television ads, jingles to memorise, as well as pep rallies. The rival group—former secretary P. Murari, Prasad, Chandra—favoured a more programme-oriented approach. Dixit, early in the game, played honest broker. As Murari put it: "The whole idea should have been to implant something lasting and concrete that would remind people of Nehru in a meaningful way."

Added Chandra: "I was impressed by one remark made at a National Committee meeting by Pupul Jayakar. She said that our programme would be judged a total success if, instead of going in all directions, we could do just one thing successfully such as giving drinking water to all villages."

Dixit was able to persuade the prime minister to drop his close friend Chopra along with others from the committee.

But during the earlier days the only public face of the Nehru committee that was seen were media functions and rallies. And the schism within the committee hardened. A high-level memo from the Cabinet Secretariat to the prime minister last summer listed the serious differences within the committee. Said Dixit in an interview then: "I am aware of the differences. But some of these are teething problems and we will make sure that the committee's work makes an impact."

In July, it looked as if the Chopra side was winning. Murari was suddenly shifted out as secretary and replaced by Vardarajan who already wore three other hats—secretary Sports Ministry, secretary Culture Ministry, and director-general Sports Authority of India. "This was the low point for the committee," an insider said. "It seemed that we would be subsumed by the Culture Ministry and become part of the *Utsav* phenomenon."

Ultimately it was up to Dixit, who has emerged as a power-house in the Prime Minister's Office, to break the stalemate. Coming down solidly on the Chandra-Prasad side, she was able to persuade Rajiv to drop Chopra along with the others from the committee.

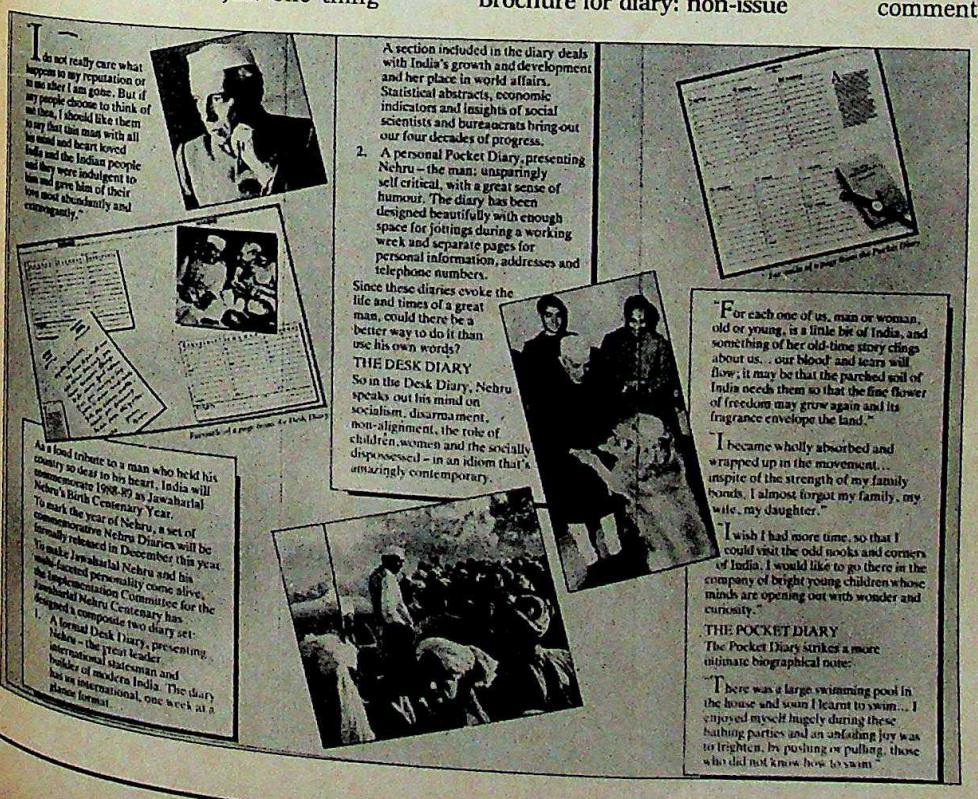
Chopra has not made a direct comment. Pitroda agrees that no government programme "should be all gimmickry", and added that he welcomed his own exit from the committee, "because I really have so much else to do".

But Dixit, sources close to her say, has scored a public relations victory for the prime minister's image. Placing friends like Chopra in high-visibility spots had earned the prime minister hostility from the party and influential bureaucrats. "In part, Chopra's removal," a senior official commented, "was necessitated because the committee had become too politicised and faced paralysis at a crucial juncture. Part of it was the continuous process of image-building by delinking himself from friends in public."

As of now the implementation committee is considering the launching of four major programmes designed to have a lasting impact: afforestation of the Himalayas; developing and remodelling science centres across the country; special programmes for the handicapped; and an all out assault on crimes against women. But the most immediate impact the change is likely to have is on the political image of Rajiv, whose publicists have convinced him that he should be seen as a man willing to sacrifice friends at the altar of nation-building causes.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR

Brochure for diary: non-issue



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PUNJAB

Deadly Spurt

Terrorist violence escalates

EVEN though Governor S.S. Ray might choose to disagree, the fact is that he is increasingly beginning to resemble Sisyphus; and the boulder of terrorism, that he would lead us to believe has been pushed over the hump, rolled back menacingly last fortnight, snuffing out 175 innocent lives. Among those left dead in the weeks of gory violence leading up to Diwali, was Major-General B.N. Kumar, chairman of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), whose merciless gunning down in the heart of Chandigarh sent shockwaves through the state.

The lie has been given once again to the state's claims, and in tragic fashion. Just a few days before the incident, Ray and Director-General of Police K.P.S. Gill had asserted at a press conference that the security forces were gaining control of the law and order situation. Ray went to the extent of declaring that "to begin with, our aim would be to bring down the number of killings to less than 50 per month". Then the crunch came and the state was found wanting.

Terrorists struck on buses, planted bombs, and executed classic terrorist killings. The most chilling example of the last was the gunning down of Kumar, who was on deputation with the BBMB, in broad daylight outside his house in Sector 35 of Chandigarh. The killers, who used AK-47 assault rifles, escaped undetected in their Maruti car through the heavily-barricaded roads of the capital city. Kumar had recently been in the news due to the Bhakra Dam's controversial role in triggering floods in Punjab. It had been alleged the BBMB could have saved the situation by releasing large quantities of water over an extended span of time. Kumar had boldly made public all the records to show he had adhered to the statutes, and had welcomed any judicial probe into the charges. But the terrorists sought publicity through a perverse act of vendetta, as "revenge" for the hundreds who died in the floods.

The pattern was equally grim all over the state, where scores died in the market-places of both small towns and big cities. The massive reinforcements rushed to almost all districts, especially the border, were a sign of panic, and yielded little. Truck-loads of CRPF and BSF jawans numbering about a thousand guarded a few square kilometres of the thickly-populated Chakri Bazar of Batala subdivision in Gurdaspur, where two bomb blasts had claimed 27 lives on November 4, and yet could not prevent another blast three days later at the city's busy civil hospital area right under their noses. It took place hours after the first relaxation in curfew—to permit festival shopping—and indicated the existence of a determined bunch of killers.

The tense situation in Batala is representative of entire Punjab. Rabid discontent against police inaction and their inability to save civilians' lives suffuses the city. Mrs Prem Malhotra, social worker and resident of Chakri Bazar area, who was an eyewitness to the aftermath of the bomb blast, said the first victims of the mob fury in the city were the policemen who were heavily brick batted within minutes of the blast.

The tremendous upsurge in violence has also shattered the assessment of the police top brass that the killers in Punjab are today a divided and frustrated lot. The administration has, in fact, been underestimating the strength and striking power of the killer gangs essentially because of recent reports of bickerings among top militant leaders. The police had recently concluded that of late the pattern of incidents betrayed that the terrorists were getting desperate, their strikes now being a sign of weakness.

But the facts are to the contrary. Factionalism does exist at the top echelons, but the terrorists are getting hundreds of new recruits and an unceasing supply of firearms. What is most alarming is that the gangs are more confident and bolder than ever before, operating with impudence in big groups. In the Ludhiana killings of labourers, the number of gun-toting men was more than a dozen, and in the killing of bus passengers in Gurdaspur, more than 10 youths struck in police uniform. The impunity on display has been amazing. The killers of nine train passengers at Rure Asal in Amritsar leisurely walked away after their butchering. Then there have been half a dozen incidents of kidnapping in the Mand area; in some the vehicle of abduction has been a bicycle.

Such audacity has made a mockery of state statistics. Indeed, villagers in the border belt—from Khemkaran in Amritsar district to Dera Baba Nanak in Gurdaspur—contrary to state claims, continue to provide shelter and recruits to terrorists.

The situation seems to be moving to a point of no return on the political front too. A protest note written by transferred inspector general of police Chaman Lal to Gill has established beyond doubt that deposed Akal Takht chief Jasbir Singh Rode had connections with the top intelligence agencies in Delhi. Rode, it is likely, will try and convene a congregation in the name of sarbat khalsa very soon, and will do so with the help of the Centre. The Punjab police has already started pressurising the bedrock of militancy, the Damdami Taksal, for the purpose. To the face of it the Centre's Punjab policy appears to be still stuck on the Ray-Ribeiro-Rode groove. And little hope or change appears visible on the horizon.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

Slain Kumar: well-planned hit

Indian Express

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THE CPI

An Overdue Overhaul

A party shake-up in an Indian version of *glasnost*

IF the Kremlin moves, can our very own Communist Party of India (CPI) be far behind. And if the bastion of the left effects its purges in slow doses, can their Indian clones do it any different. While Mikhail Gorbachev was busy restructuring the Kremlin hierarchy, the highest policy making body of the CPI, the National Council, was indicating, in mid-October, changes that are bound to have far-reaching consequences.

As an immediate step toward an Indian version of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the 164-member National Council created a new post of deputy general secretary and appointed veteran trade unionist and parliamentarian Indrajit Gupta, who will soon replace the "iron-man" of the Indian communist movement, party General Secretary C. Rajeshwar Rao, responsible for guiding the party's destiny for nearly a quarter century.

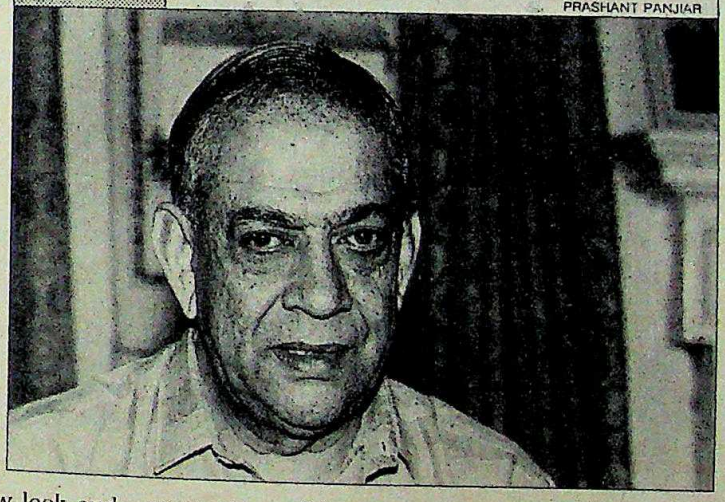
The decision to appoint Gupta, 69, as head of the party comes at a time when the CPI, after 62 years of ideological thunderings and political wanderings, and 25 years of follies and frustration, has realised that its programmes and policies need a re-evaluation, a new look and new blood. As a party spokesman admitted: "We are setting up an entirely new team to face the new challenges." Rao told INDIA TODAY, the purge has started from "top to bottom".

To begin with, the party accepted the resignations of Jagannath Sarkar—once tipped as successor to Rao—and Rajshekhar Reddy from the membership of the central secretariat, on "health grounds". Appointed in their place were Avtar Singh Malhotra, Punjab state secretary and Promod Gogoi, Assam state secretary. In the next phase, five senior members of the Central Executive Committee including Sunil Mukherjee, Raj Bahadur Gaur, N.K. Krishnan and Biswanath Mukherjee, all aged and ailing, were replaced by Piara Singh Deosi, Pauli V. Prakkal, editor of the party organ *New Age*, Loknath Chaudhary, Orissa state secretary, Yella Manda Reddy, president of the Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union, and Satpal Dang.

The exercise was aimed at bringing in relatively young and active leaders who could cohere into a dynamic body. According to Rao, in due course, more youngsters will be given responsibilities for, as Sarkar puts it, the communist movement is overloaded with old people.

The decision to elevate Indrajit Gupta follows the realisation that CPI policies need re-evaluation and a new look.

PRASHANT PANJIAR



Though CPI leaders insist the party overhauling has nothing to do with Gorbachev's experimentation in Moscow, the fact is that the Soviet leader's path-breaking steps have ignited the Indians to take a fresh look at things. The changes are an effort to reassess political strategies and re-mould programmes to suit the changing socio-economic realities of the country. Leaders claim realisation of awry programmes and political lines—which had caused disasters for the party in the past—had dawned at the 13th Congress held in Patna two years ago. It was then, for the first time, that the CPI had decided to revamp the programmes which had been adopted and pushed vigorously since the 1964 split.

The CPI has blundered in the past—each time it showed signs of emerging as a power to reckon with, it meandered to become marginal. Experts feel its initial tilt toward the Congress, and then its endorsement of the Emergency, were grave mistakes. Earlier too, in 1967, the joining of hands with the Jana Sangh and Swatantra Party, mostly deemed as "right reactionary forces", tarnished its image. But with obduracy, the CPI leadership had turned a deaf ear to such criticism, even purging those suggesting a different line. During the party's last congress, as many as 20 National Council members, including known dissidents S.G. Sardesai, Mohit Sen, H.K. Vyas and K.S. Shukla were sacked.

It was in 1985, on the eve of its 60th anniversary, that the party council discovered that its follies had retarded the organisation's growth. From a membership of a mere 15,563 in 1943 (first party congress) it had peaked to 546,732 in 1978 (11th party congress), but by 1986 had dropped to 478,905. Leaders like Sarkar admit the party was worried about this stagnation. The CPI last month thus decided to bring *glasnost* to its cadres, opening its doors to even non-communist youth.

The CPI has reason to worry. Its nightmare, in particular, is the Indian People's Front (IPF). An umbrella organisation of over 250 ultra-left groups, it's threatening to swamp left strongholds, including Bihar where the CPI has its widest base (approximately 1.12 lakh card-holders). Set up in 1982, the IPF has seen phenomenal growth and, with units in 16 states and five Union territories, its Chairman Nag Bhushan Patnaik feels confident enough to assert it will soon surpass both the CPI and the CPI(M). Many Marxists have, in fact, been questioning the relevance of the CPI, and the dissident journal *Vichar Bodh*, on the eve of the 13th congress, carried an article by R.K. Garg, posing uncomfortable queries.

So, the effort is aimed at a sea change.

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Sarkar is heading a seven-member committee deliberating this. Says he: "The commission has just concluded its work and the report will be discussed at the next National Council meeting in December." The report will then be circulated to members for suggestions and will finally be discussed and adopted at the 14th party congress in Calcutta. "Some major changes have been suggested but it would not be possible to disclose the content now," he adds.

But one thing is evident: the CPI has decided to harden its attitude towards the Rajiv Gandhi Government—essentially to ensure its own survival—and from the Rajiv Government in a big way.

Political pundits believe the planned exit of Rao and the induction of Gupta are most significant. Gupta with his spellbinding style and vast trade union base is expected to give the CPI an overdue face-lift. Gupta indicated the new tack he intends to follow by asserting that in a country with so many parties, it becomes inevitable for those who share common ground to make electoral adjustments. "The Congress(I) can't be allowed to take advantage of the fact that there are so many parties. The current mood of the people indicates that they want the opposition parties to make

General Secretary C. Rajeshwar Rao, responsible for guiding the party's destiny for nearly a quarter century, admits more young people will be given responsibilities.

K.M. KISHAN

Rajeshwar Rao (centre, first row) at the 13th party congress

has set the removal of the Government as its goal. Explaining this aggressive posture, Rao says things have reached a stage where the Congress(I) and Rajiv want to destroy all that has been achieved in the past.

At the same time, CPI leaders aren't optimistic about the emergence of a left national front, mainly because of the weaknesses of the left parties. The best course open to the CPI is to bank on the politics of alliances and electoral adjustments. In support of such a strategy, Rao cites an example: in Bihar, the CPI went alone last time and got only 12 seats, whereas in the past with adjustments it had bagged 22. Keeping this in mind, the CPI leadership had hailed the formation of the seven-party National Front, and felt that the people were moving away adjustments," he said recently.

As general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress since 1980, as vice-president of the World Federation of Trade Unions since 1982, as member of Parliament since 1957 (except between 1977-80), and as a former St Stephen's and Cambridge University student, Gupta will definitely try to give a new image to the CPI. But the moot question is: can he change its fate line, veering it towards a greater degree of relevance? For that, like his preceptor behind the iron curtain, he will have to peer some more through a microscope at his party, and the surrounding reality of the Indian subcontinent. —FARZAND AHMED

WEST BENGAL

Bitter Win

Jatin Chakraborty resigns

BIG brother CPI(M) calls the shots in West Bengal. This became evident once again when the gutsy Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leader and former PWD minister Jatin Chakraborty finally buckled under pressure from the all powerful Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and submitted his resignation last fortnight.

The victory was Basu's no doubt, but it must have left a bitter taste in his mouth. For, the drama that culminated in Chakraborty's resignation did untold damage to the septuagenarian's reputation. For the first time in the 11 years that Basu has dominated state politics, doubts were cast on his honesty.

Earlier, Chakraborty had accused Basu of insisting on bulk orders for flourescent tubes from Bengal Lamps Works Ltd, to promote the business interests of his son, Chandan Basu, who worked there till 1979. The PWD minister noted this on a file, which was reproduced in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the state's leading daily on September 18.

Since then, Basu and the CPI(M) had launched a relentless campaign against Chakraborty. They demanded:

- The PWD minister's resignation.
- Withdrawal of his notes that were reproduced in the paper.
- An unconditional apology from him.

At first, Chakraborty stuck to his guns. Not only did his own party stand by him, two other Left Front partners, the Forward Bloc and the CPI, also came out in his support. For a while it appeared that the scandal would galvanise them into rebellion against the mighty CPI(M), which they claim has been riding roughshod over them. The possibility of a split in the Left Front—in power in Bengal for 11 years—wasn't ruled out.

At a meeting on October 26, Forward Bloc Secretary Ashok Ghosh insisted the RSP should not be pressured into withdrawing Chakraborty from the Cabinet. Basu was told he did not have the authority to sack ministers as they were chosen by their parties. Fumed Basu: "You see whether I can. We shall go to the people for their support."

The RSP, meanwhile, was willing to

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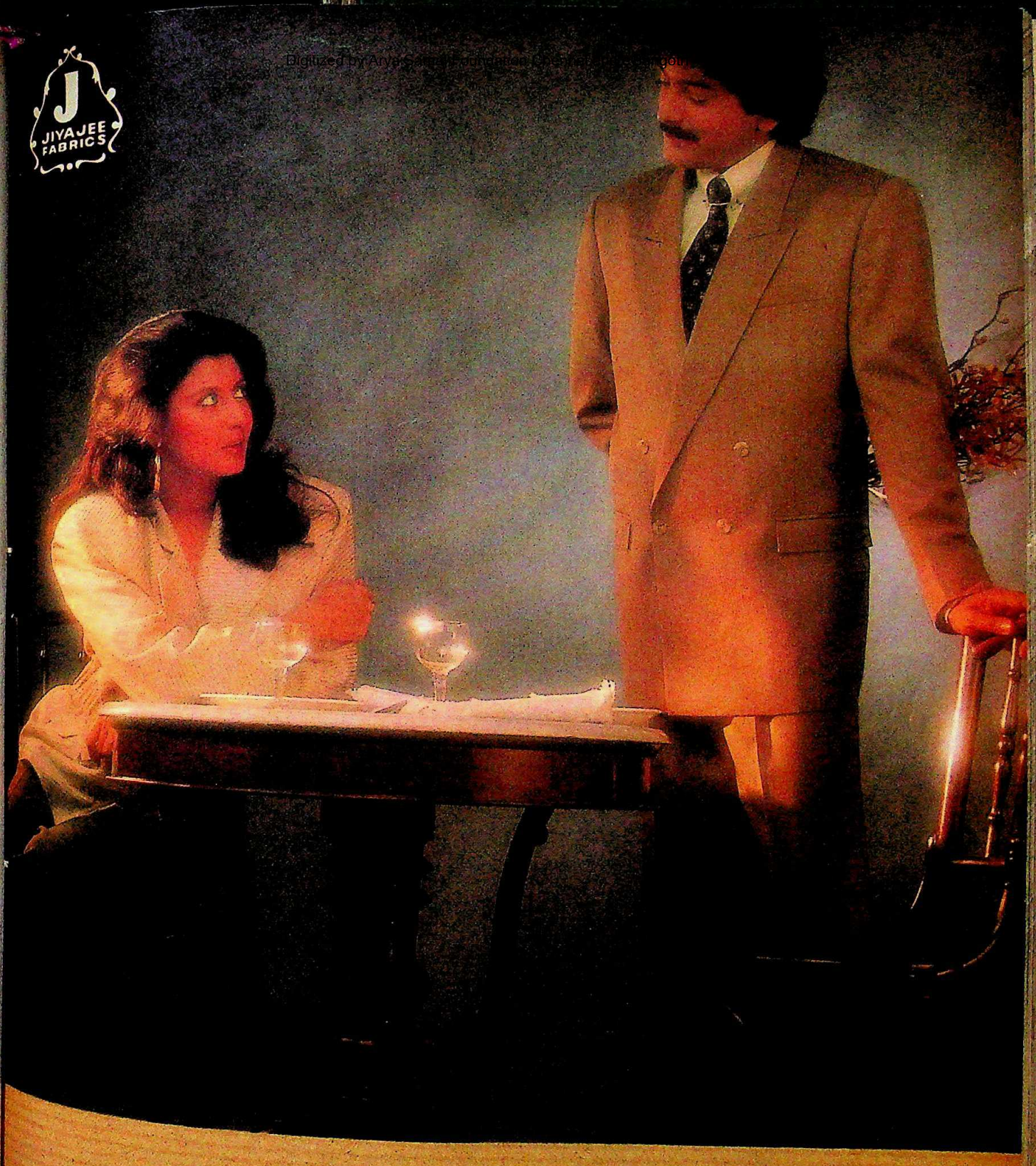

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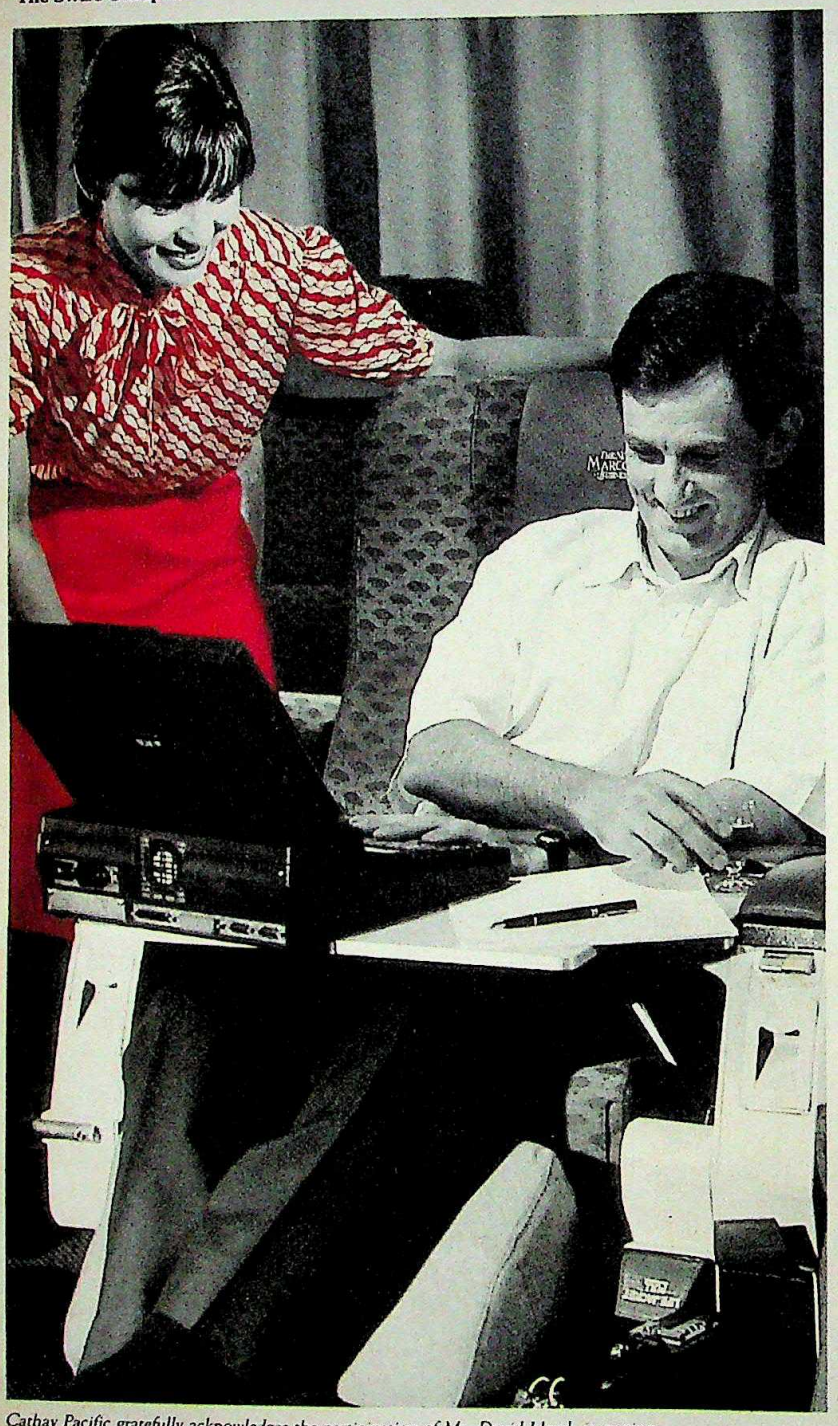

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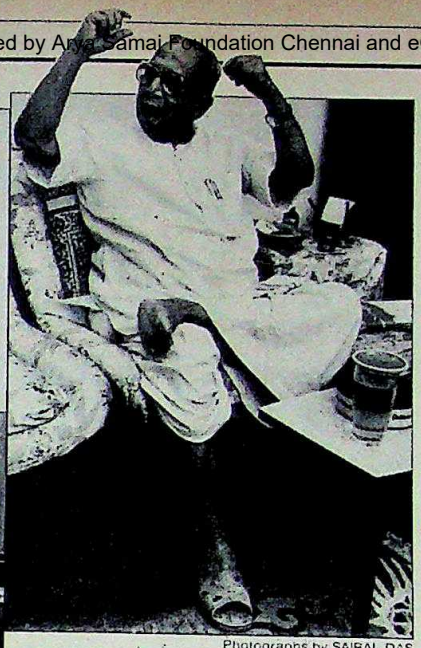
Chakraborty feels that he has come out victorious and his resignation has demonstrated "that truth is more valuable than anything else".



Photographs by SAIBAL DAS

Basu, the most respected Marxist in the country, will not find it easy to wipe out the stain of nepotism that now soils his excellent record.

meet the CPI(M) halfway. It was prepared to withdraw the notes, term the controversy "unfortunate", even offer its regrets, but not withdraw Chakraborty. The Marxists weren't satisfied and the meeting ended inconclusively.

It was evident that the CPI(M) wasn't in a forgiving mood. Left Front Chairman and CPI(M) state Secretary Saroj Mukherjee said: "There can be no amicable settlement as Chakraborty has made further insinuations against the chief minister by stating in his latest letter that Basu was acting beneath his dignity. He has to go." All the same, at the October 26 meet, the Marxists refrained from bulldozing their decision on the Forward Bloc and RSP, as they feared a split in the ministry.

Just when a battle royale between the CPI(M) and the junior front partners seemed imminent, the RSP leadership caved in and directed Chakraborty to resign. At 10 p.m. on October 28, Chakraborty went to the Raj Bhavan to submit his resignation, but Basu refused to meet him. Clearly, he would not forgive and forget. Basu even objected to the wording of the letter, but it was now Chakraborty's turn to be adamant and he refused to alter it.

Now the doughty Chakraborty says: "I have come out victorious. By resigning I have demonstrated that truth is more valuable to me than anything else....I would refuse to carry my father's name, I would be a bastard if anything is proved untrue." The RSP, however, refuses to comment. Fear of the CPI(M) throwing it out of the front has obviously made it guarded.

True, the entire episode resulted in a loss of face for the RSP, which initially put up a spirited defence but soon realised that to survive in the front it had to toe the CPI(M)'s line. But Basu too came down a couple of notches in the public's estimation. It will not be easy for the most respected Marxist in the country to wipe out the stain of nepotism that now soils his excellent record. As Chakraborty says: "His image has been shattered. It is no more lily-white."

The only person to have benefited from the controversy is the newly-appointed state PCC(I) chief A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary, who is demanding the formation of a legislative committee to inquire into the charges against Basu (Chakraborty wants a judicial inquiry). By hurling accusations at each other, the Left Front constituents have made Ghani Khan's task that much easier. Instead of attacking the Government at the Centre, for the first time Bengal's Marxist rulers will be at the receiving end—as they defend themselves against the inevitable barrage of corruption charges.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

ANDHRA PRADESH

Road Shock

A counter-dharna by Rama Rao

IF you can't beat them, join them. This was the strategy an exasperated Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao decided upon last fortnight to upstage the four-month-long agitation of the Rayalaseema Joint Action Committee, which has been demanding more irrigation facilities and steps to initiate all-round development in their drought-prone region.

On November 1, the 33rd birthday of the state, Rama Rao took the protestors by surprise when he joined them at 11.20 a.m. in blocking entry to the state secretariat—by lying flat on the road.

Taken aback, the agitators led by Congress(I) MLAs made way for the chief minister to enter. But he did the unexpected—he declared he would discuss matters with the "brothers from Rayalaseema" then and there, on the road itself.

But the protestors refused to oblige, saying they would talk to him only during their appointed meeting at 12.30 p.m. inside the secretariat. Rama Rao too, however, did not budge on his demand to thrash out matters immediately. With a stalemate being reached, at 11.40 a.m. Rama Rao unconcernedly spread his green-coloured shawl on the road and settled down for a mid-day nap.

Within minutes, several Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supporters including Home Minister K. Sivaprasada Rao, Irrigation Minister K.E. Krishnamurthy and Minister for Roads and Buildings K. Jana Reddy—who unsuccessfully tried playing a mediatory role between the protestors and the chief minister—rushed to the spot and squatted by their mentor.

The police, anticipating trouble, promptly formed a human wall around the chief minister, cordoning him off from the crowd. Their fears weren't unfounded. The situation soon took an ugly turn with the restive agitators pelting the chief minister with chappals and stones.

Rama Rao then made two attempts to speak to the protestors but was shouted down. And four-and-a-half hours after he began the street show, the ruffled chief minister was escorted by the

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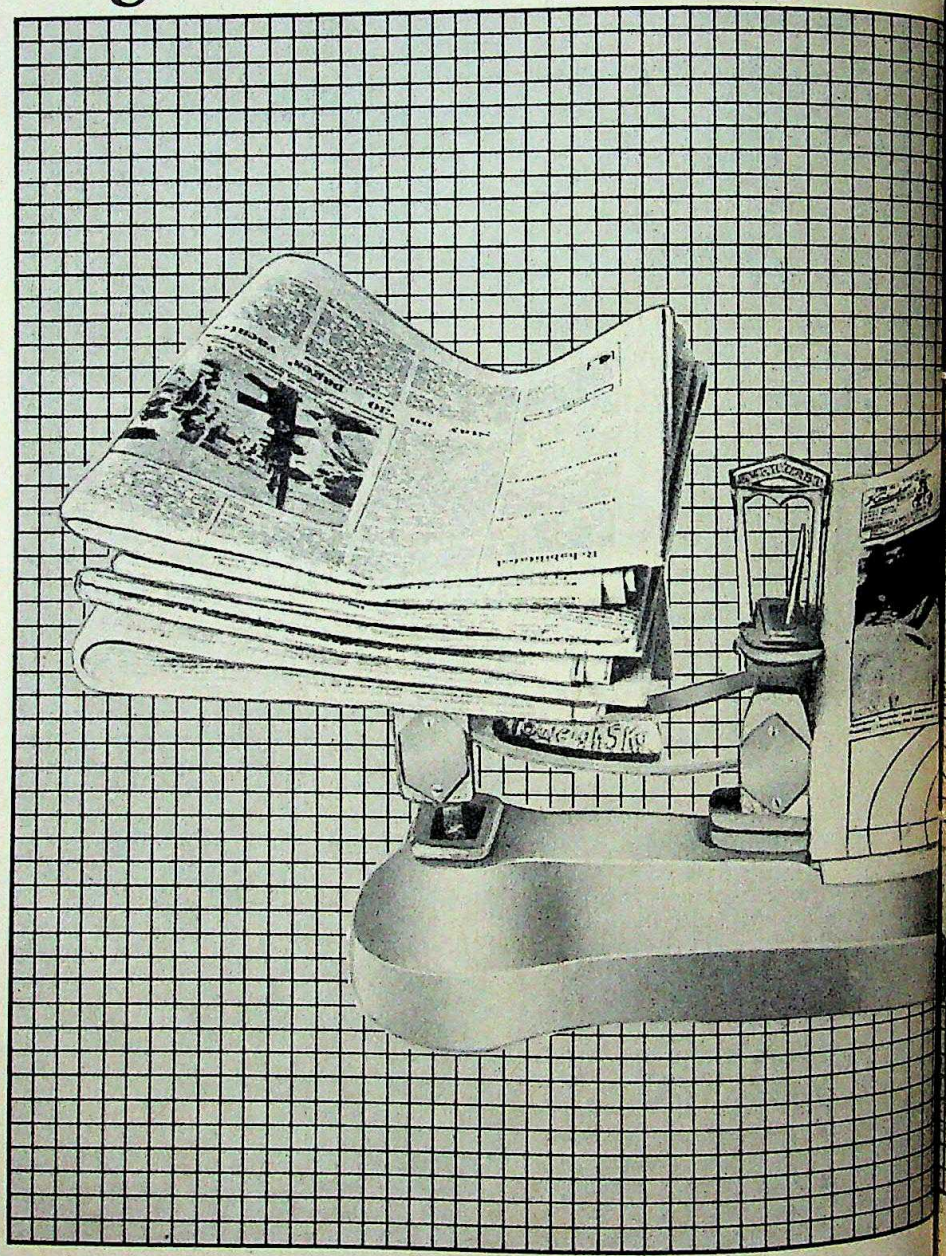

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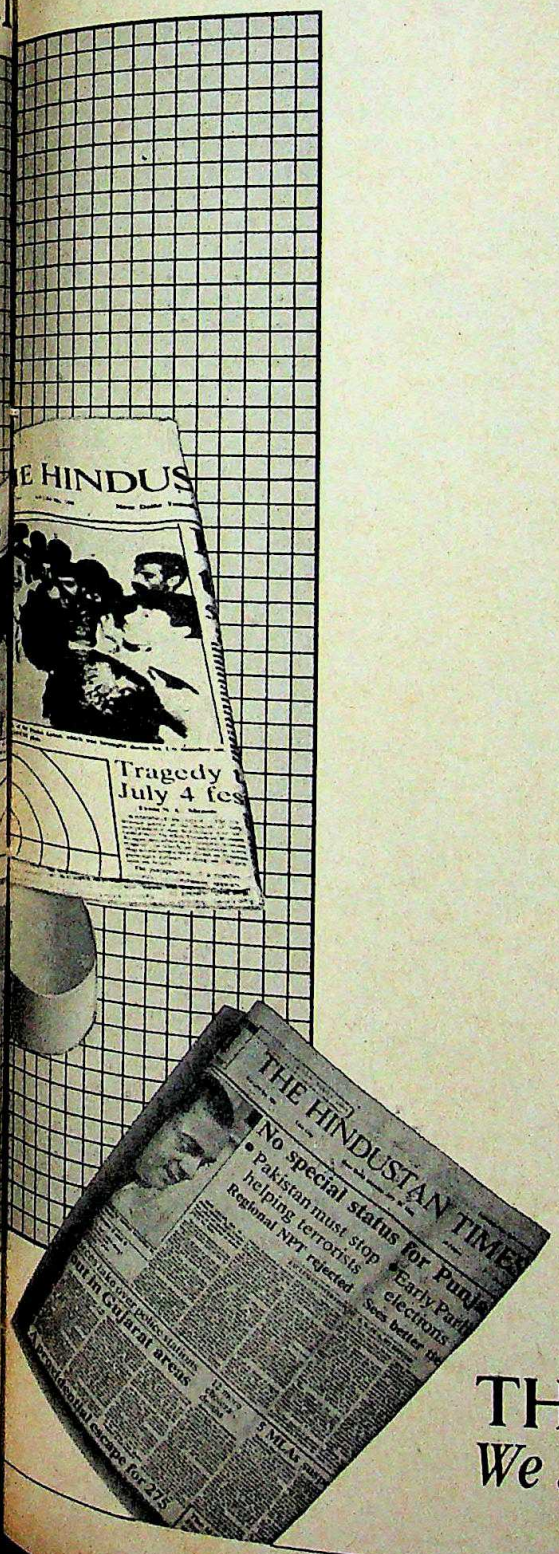

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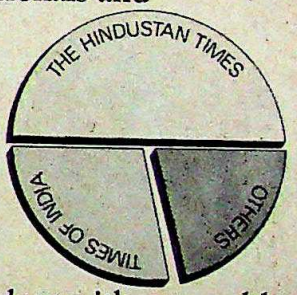

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police to an official car and driven off.

A head-on collision had become inevitable with both Rama Rao and the action committee earlier ignoring police directives. Though the agitators had been given permission to sit on a hunger strike, it was at a spot where demonstrations going towards the secretariat are stopped. But they marched instead towards the secretariat. On his part, Rama Rao too ignored the police's advice to go home after the state formation day celebrations; he headed for the secretariat where he conducted his novel counter-dharna.

What prompted this extreme step? Perhaps his peevishness at the fact that

BABJI/JANATA

Rama Rao on the pavement: street show

though he'd already fixed a formal meeting with the agitators led by Congress(I) MLA Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, they'd still taken to the streets in this manner. Rama Rao felt vexed in particular as he'd given in to their demand that he meet them on November 1, even though they'd been asked to meet him on October 30 as he had a heavy schedule the next day—it being the state formation day. But precisely for that reason the committee insisted on meeting Rama Rao on November 1 since "it was an important day in the history of Andhra Pradesh and it was appropriate to highlight the demands of a region on such a day".

Highlighted, however, wasn't the protest of the Congress(I)-led action committee but the thespian-turned-chief minister's theatrics—through which he succeeded in having his picture flashed in all dailies, instead of that of the protestors.

Piqued at this unexpected turn of events, the newly-appointed APCC(I) President N. Janardhana Reddy termed Rama Rao's squatting as a "mere political stunt". And declared Union Home Minister Buta Singh: "Only he can lie on the road for four hours."

But the self-styled "*dattaputra*" (adopted son) of Rayalaseema—Rama Rao represents the Hindupur constituency in the region—was unfazed by these charges, realising as he did that he had clearly, if inadvertently, won this round.

Though the action committee accused Rama Rao of insulting the people of their region by refusing to accept its charter of demands and called for a general strike on November 4 in the four districts of Rayalaseema, it drew only a half-hearted response.

While Janardhan Reddy admits Rama Rao scored a point by his show of theatrical talent, he asks: "Is it right for a chief minister to behave in this manner, more so for one who talks of safeguarding the self-respect of the Telugu-speaking people, and that too on the state's birthday?" But an unabashed N.T. Rama Rao is unlikely to heed such carping and will continue to act in a manner that has reaped him rich rewards. He will remain what he is: a performer *par excellence* with all the state his stage.

—AMARNATH K. MENON

BIHAR

Striking Out

NGEs put Jha in a tight spot

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi did not come to Barbigha, crying off at the last moment; and the sagging image of Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad and the state Congress(I) deflated further. This boosted further the efforts of party dissidents and the Opposition to capitalise on the longest ever indefinite strike by nearly eight lakh non-gazetted employees (NGE) of the state.

While news of the postponed visit (ostensibly because of the coup attempt at Maldives) sent striking government employees and opposition workers into the streets, shouting, "Rajiv Gandhi ran away", spirits in the Congress(I) echelons sank. In fact, party workers who had come to Shekhpura from far flung areas, defying the near-total "Bihar bandh" invoked by the Joint Opposition Coordination Committee (JOCC), became so restive that none of the party leaders had the courage to face them, and it was left to a police officer to pacify the crowd.

It was yet another set back for Azad, who was sent to Bihar nine months ago to stem the rot and revitalise the party and administration and has been under siege from day one. Azad has torn the faction-ridden Congress(I) legislature apart, has provoked both Assembly Speaker Shiv Chandra Jha and former chief minister Jagannath Mishra, and has antagonised several other sections. Party sources claim all their troubles stem from Azad's decision to deal with matters in a no-nonsense fashion, making no allowance for political considerations.

The biggest way this has boomeranged is in the strike of the powerful non-gazetted employees, who play a crucial role in every election. The employees struck work indefinitely on September 6, demanding Central pay scales and increased interim relief. This, at a time when over three crore people were reeling under the devastation of floods and an earthquake, with the financially-crippled state Government stretched to its limit.

Azad and his advisers initially miscalculated the employees' resolve. They reckoned that with Durga puja in the offing the employees would be tempted

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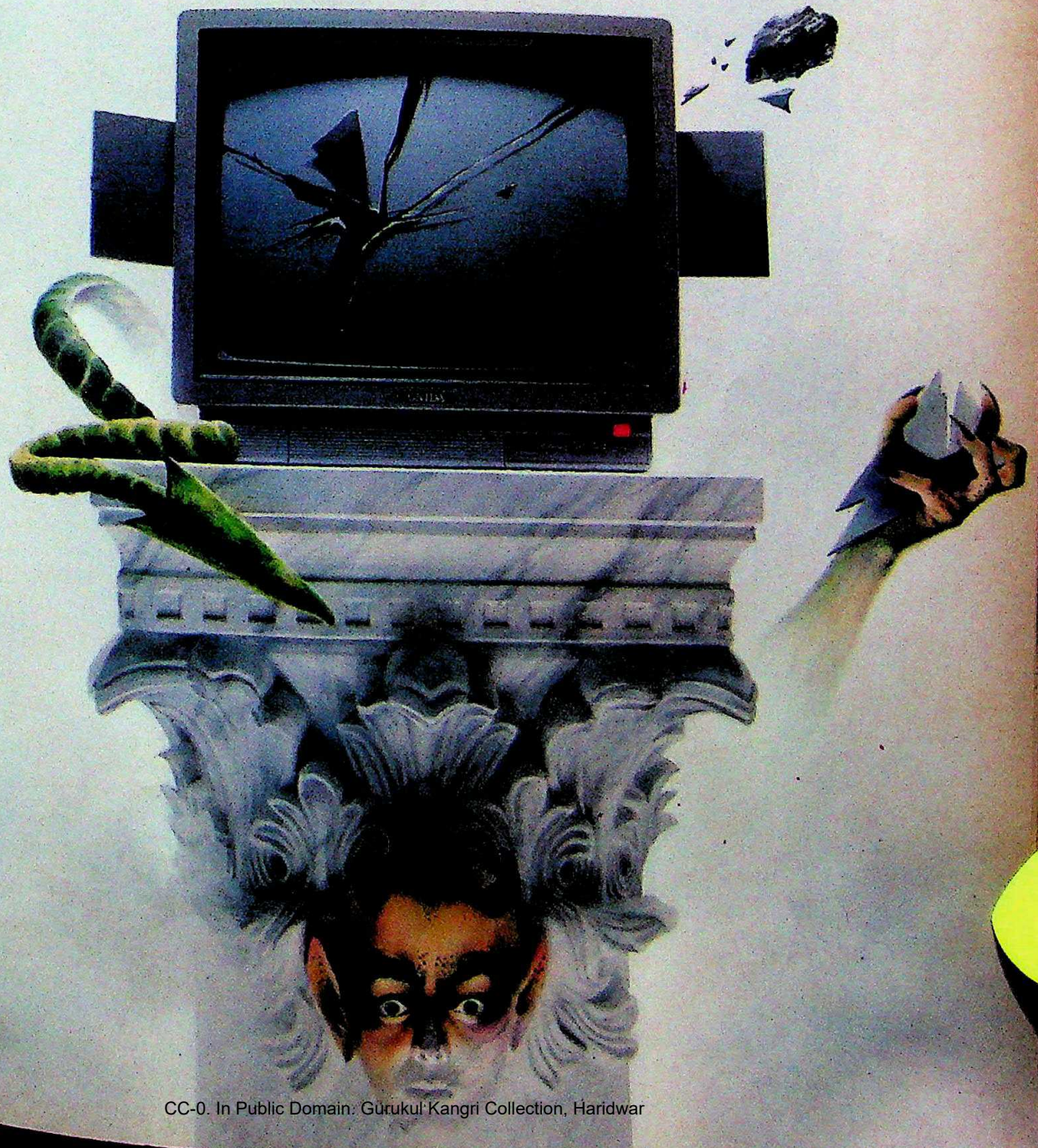

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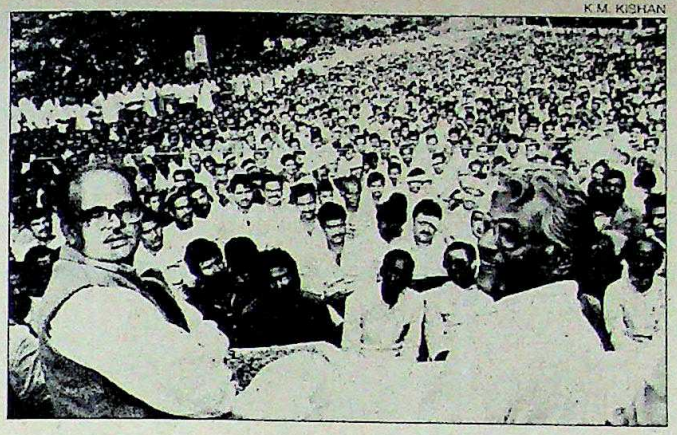
K.M. KISHAN

V.P. Singh and Fernandes at NGEs rally

to call off the agitation. Consequently, the Government went on issuing advertisements in the newspapers, reminding the workers of the forthcoming festival, and asking them: "Will you not buy new clothes and sweets for your family members?" This proved an insult to the employees' injury, completely cementing their resolve, and unity.

While the state Government sat silent for the first 34 days, the situation deteriorated, providing ample opportunity to dissidents and the Opposition to lash out. Jagannath Mishra, leading the dissident pack, made things more uncomfortable for Azad by sympathising with the striking employees and urging the high command to intervene. The opposition parties meanwhile bunched together to form a "Joint Opposition Coordination Committee", headed by former minister Kapil Deo Singh, in order to back the strike. Azad then, belatedly, set up a four-member cabinet sub-committee to look into the matter. The subcommittee accomplished nothing. The Government claimed the NGEs were already getting interim relief at the rate of 15 per cent, costing the state exchequer Rs 105 crore annually, and their demand for an additional 17.5 per cent would mean a further burden of Rs 160 crore. Besides, the employees also sought the immediate release of impounded dearness allowance (Rs 443 crore), and implementation of Central pay scales (Rs 300 crore). Kapil Deo Singh, however, countered this, asserting that the burden of the latter would not exceed Rs 121 crore.

Azad's plea that the Government

Men's Lib

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

THE backlash is here. A vigorous movement for the protection of married women has resulted over the past decade in stringent laws, strong public opinion and redressal mechanisms for them. Last month, then, an all India front against atrocities by wives suddenly emerged. What started out as a small nucleus of middle-aged men around Delhi's subordinate courts, snowballed within weeks. Membership was soon in the hundreds. By month-end, branches had been set up in Aligarh, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Allahabad, Bombay and Mysore.

Their demands: that the police cell for crimes against women be closed, the police keep out of domestic disputes, wives and their families be arrested when they harass their husbands, and that divorce by mutual consent be simplified.

The prime mover is R.P. Chugh, an advocate who has the experience of a broken second marriage and a hundred divorce cases. He is no defender of the dowry system, he claims, having fought the evil alongside women activists for years. But, he has now come to realise, "dowry is just used". Since harassment of wives is now a cognisable offense, a woman's complaint is enough to land her in-laws in jail. Some women have misused the provision for blackmail or revenge. Some activist women say that 20 to 30 per cent of women's complaints are not genuine.

Some people dismissed the movement as a bandwagon of chauvinists unable to accept the changing modern equations. While that is certainly true of some, there are also many genuinely harassed men, victims of blatant misuse of the law.

Proof, if it were needed, lies in the recent suicides by young men. Raj Kumar, 33, committed suicide in June after a week's nasty abuse and humiliation by the police. In a letter to his three sons—the youngest just four months old—he said his life had become worse than a dog's. Chugh lists a dozen such suicides by husbands.

Part of the problem is police bungling. It is the rare officer who actually investigates complaints. More often, they bludgeon their way through cases with preconceived notions. Worse, they are open to bribes. The chief target in Delhi is the Crimes against Women Cell. Without cars and other facilities, sub-inspectors and even constables set themselves up as "counsellors" to arbitrarily force a settlement. Women officers seem as brutal as any and there are complaints of beating even by them.

Women activists as well as the Government are aware of the problem but feel that on balance the need to protect women outweighs the injustice some men face. Says Margaret Alva, minister of state in charge of women's affairs: "Which law is perfect? For every guilty person who hangs, there might be an innocent man too."

The attitude is dangerous. Turning a blind eye to injustice will only give a handle to the chauvinists and ultimately undermine the movement for sexual equality. To put things in perspective, though, the number of men who commit suicide is less than one for every hundred Indian wives who hang, take poison or are burnt every year.

—DAVID DEVADAS

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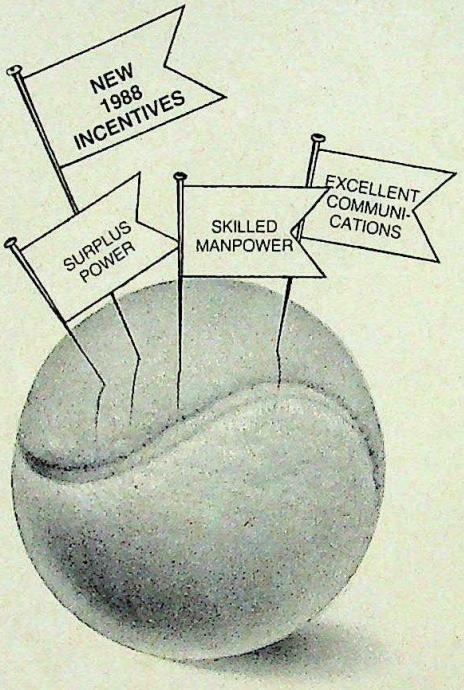

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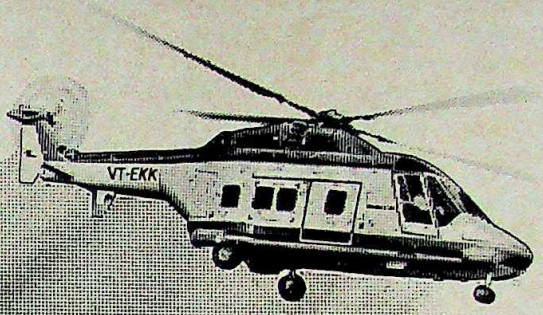

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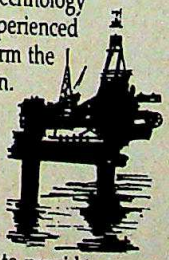

1986-88 – Pawan Hans spreads its wings
ONGC says goodbye to foreign operators. State governments and Union territories utilize helicopters to provide access to far-flung and until now inaccessible areas, thus bridging a communication gap.

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From a modest beginning of 2 helicopters to 40 helicopters today, Pawan Hans has come a long way. The service is backed by a trained and motivated staff of over 500 people operating from 2 regional centres in Delhi, Bombay and 13 other bases all over India. No wonder then that a phenomenal 34,000 flying hours have already been recorded. Pawan Hans' in-house training school at New Delhi imparts updated technical instructions in key aviation aspects, to produce men of high calibre and professional skills.

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Pawan Hans' ambitious expansion plans will explore many challenging horizons in important and diverse areas such as city centre and airport linkage in metropolitan cities, railway electrification work and helirig operations to name just a few. When man and machine come together, the sky is the limit...

The spirit continues
As India nears the 21st century, Pawan Hans gears itself to broaden its social responsibilities and write yet another glorious chapter in Indian aviation.

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Exploring new frontiers

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was in no position to mobilise additional resources, keeping in view the state's low per capita income, did not lead anywhere. Nor did their argument that they could do nothing until the recommendations of the pay revision committee came in. Azad kept on relying on newspaper advertisements: who should get priority, eight crore people or eight lakh employees of the state Government? Meanwhile, to Azad's chagrin, the Uttar Pradesh Government, following in the footsteps of Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Karnataka, announced Central scales for their employees. Why can't Bihar? immediately chorussed the employees' leaders.

Attitudes hardened, and as if the NGEs strike was not enough to paralyse the administration, 50,000 gazetted officers—barring doctors and executive officers—also ceased work, and were extended support by the state's policemen's association. It was then, in order to highlight the "callous" handling of the situation, that the JOCC gave a Bihar bandh call; and it coincided with the envisaged visit of Rajiv. At this stage the Government panicked, and the subcommittee started negotiating frenetically without results.

In the event, Rajiv never came; and instead there appeared Janata Dal chief V.P. Singh and Janata Party leader George Fernandes, attacking the prime minister and hogging the show. They urged the employees to defeat the Congress(I), and the response was terrific; Azad hardened further. Meanwhile, revolt was fanning even within the House. Jagannath Mishra raised the issue in the Rajya Sabha, seeking Central Government intervention. The Government for its part threatened to invoke the Essential Services Maintenance Act, but did not do so, fearing a further backlash.

Last fortnight, more and more employees were joining the strike, and the number of dissidents was rapidly growing, both Mishra and PCC(I) chief Tariq Anwar among them. Mishra even went to the extent of saying that the chief minister had apparently " lost his balance of mind" and was being swayed by anger because of his failure on all fronts in the past nine months. Certainly Azad, terminally embattled, appeared poised to lose everything.

—FARZAND AHMED

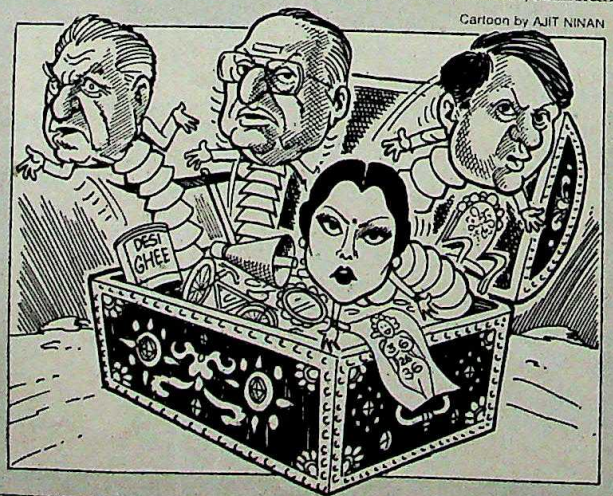
BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Baring the Assets

WITH Vishwanath Pratap Singh having made public his not inconsiderable assets last fortnight, he may have triggered off an embarrassment of riches. The pressure will now be on the ruling party and Singh's opposition colleagues to match his move or accept a chequemate. In fact, the entire political edifice of the country could be shaken to its hidden foundations should V.P. Singh's gesture prove contagious and politicians and public figures suddenly find themselves having to declare their holdings. Here's how the scenario could unfold:

N.T. Rama Rao: I would like to bare my sole to the people (lies down on pavement). You all know I never lie. You also know I only took this position in order to serve the people. Not for personal pain, I mean gain. My assets are: one Chaitanya Rath fitted with Sanyo air-conditioner and Chicago loudspeaker. 365 sets of saffron outfits. One cycle gifted by Telugu Desam Party. One unused film studio and some shares in my son-in-law's business. I also have some unity trust investments.

Devi Lal: Brothers and sisters. You are all my children. Any investment I have made is only for the sake of my children. As you know, I am a simple son of the soil, a poor farmer who, by the grace of God and Bhajan Lal, has enjoyed some good fortunes. Thanks to my bulk—and *desi* ghee—I can amass more wealth than anybody else each time I am weighed in rupee notes. But this is all for you, my children. My only love is the soil. That is why my total assets tilled now is exactly 44,212 sq km of land which is the size of my estate...I mean my state of Haryana. But this is not for me. It is for my children....



Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

Madhavrao Scindia: I have nothing to declare, I mean hide. My life is an open cheque book. As I told the income tax authorities, I only survive on royalties. I also made public my negligible foreign accounts which were accepted without any questions. A minister also made a statement in Parliament and only some opposition commoners called it a princely sum. I am not privy to any purses any more. I am a commoner like everybody else with modest needs. My assets are one small palace in Gwalior, one more that has been given out on rent to boost the country's tourism earnings, and one palace on wheels. I also have a few horses that are used for ceremonial occasions on race days. Oh yes, I also have a helicopter that I use for political work. After all, you don't expect me to travel in the Gwalior Express like the commoners do.

Rekha: Everybody has seen my assets. I like to display them at the drop of a rain. I can't help it if they happen to be the best assets in town. I mean, I am number one after all, even if it is on the income tax defaulters list. But the problem is I'm so popular and because I made a clean breast of my endowments, the darlings forgave me everything. Of course, there was a certain somebody—I won't name names but everybody knows who I mean—who did put in a word in the right ears. But I guess if you have assets like mine, people are ready to do anything for me, and I mean anything.

Rajiv Gandhi: *Hame Dekhna Hai.*

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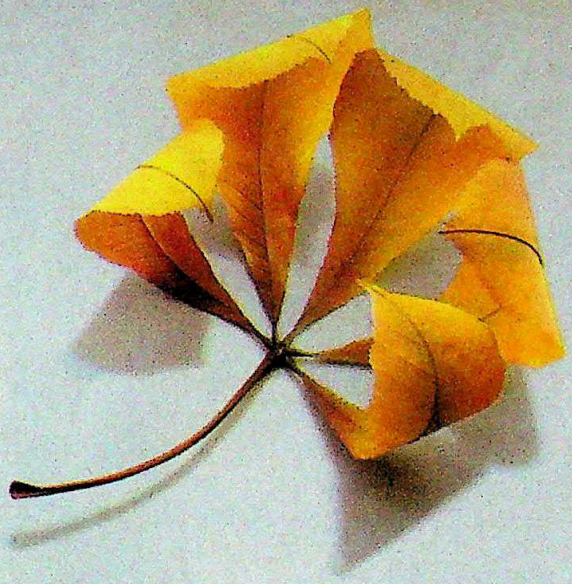

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C) A light day suit for that clean distinguished look. Jacket has notched lapels and flapped pockets. Trousers have seven loops and double pleats. Shirt is pristine white worn with a prominent tie.

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l suitings.

The statement of Ravi Shastri.

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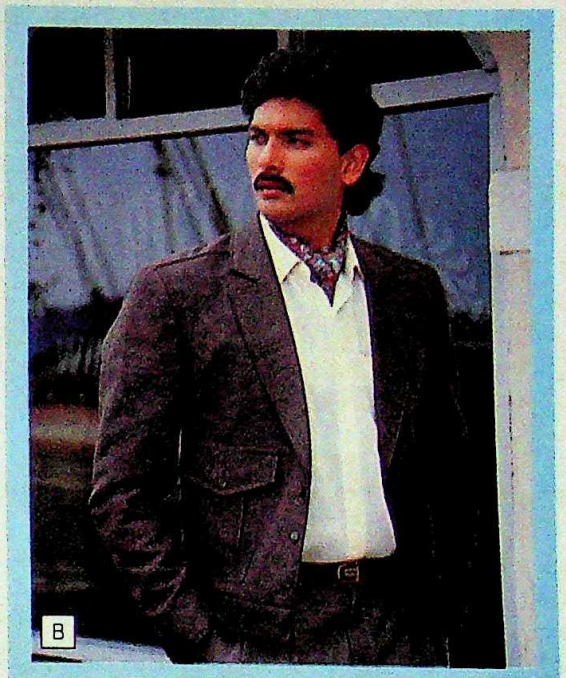

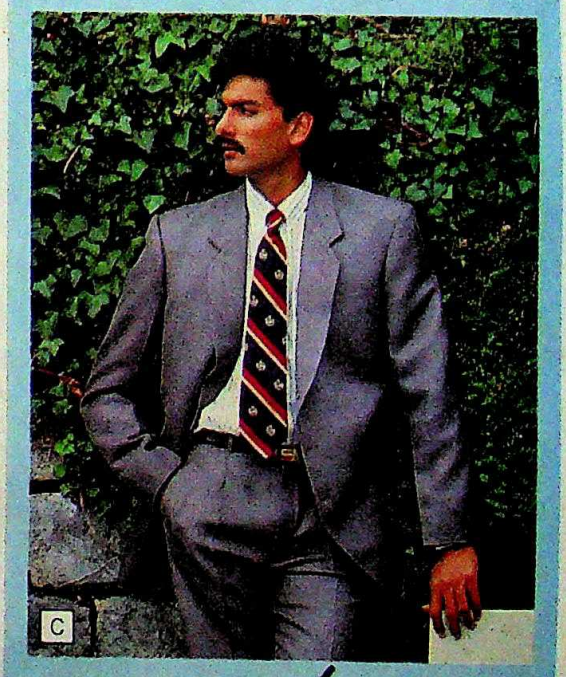

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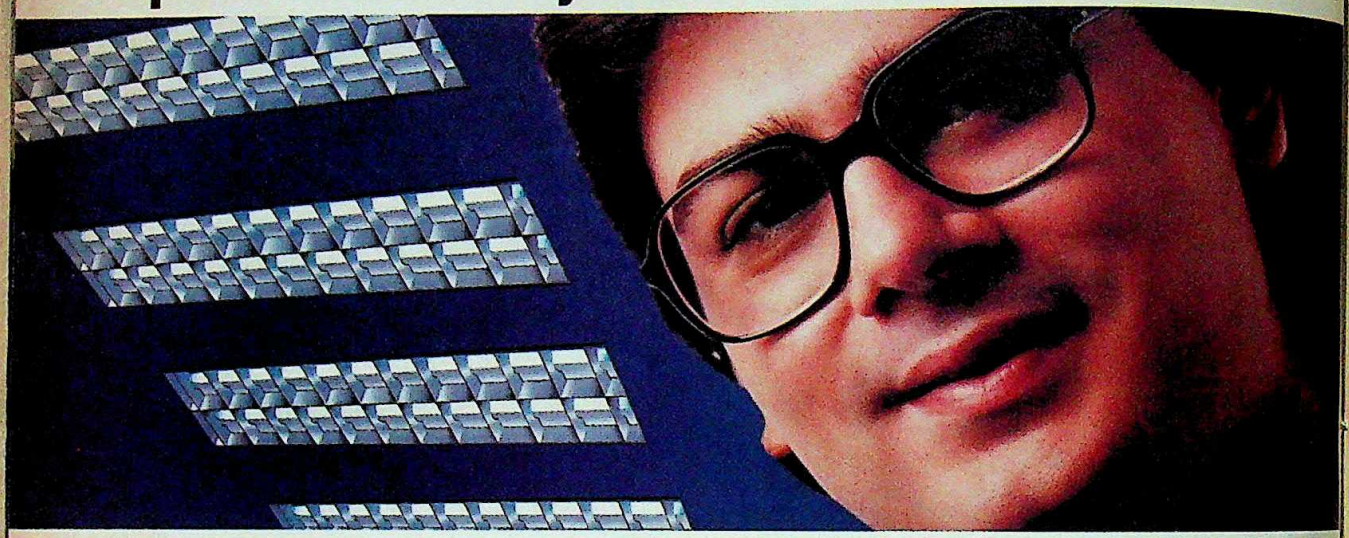
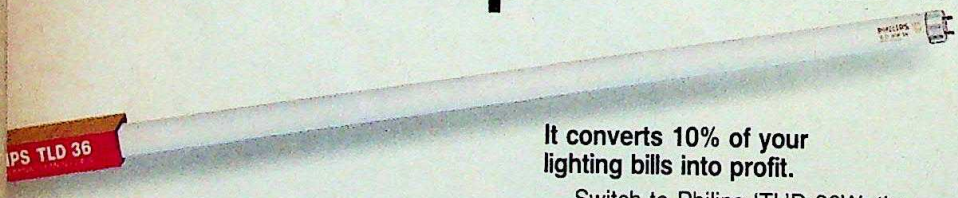


Philips 'TL'D.



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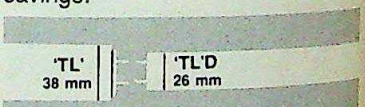

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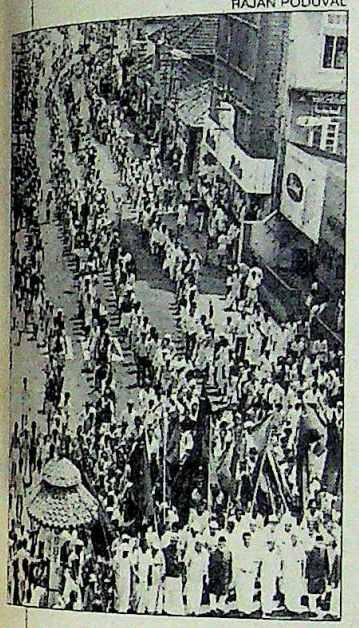
A Month of Marches

IT was a month of marches and dharnas in Kerala. As part of a gimmick to air their grievances either against the leftist E.K. Nayanar Government or the Central Government, various political parties set out on a series of walkathons in the state.

Covering 650 km from Kasargod in the northern-most part of Kerala to Trivandrum, the women's wing of the CPI-controlled All-India Youth Federation chose to highlight the Centre's adverse economic policies towards the state. The Democratic Youth Federation of India, the Marxist students' organisation, followed in their footsteps. At a dharna in front of Central Government offices in Kerala, it focused attention on the Centre's neglect of the state and its refusal to help the State Government tackle the unemployment problem. But it was the Yuva Morcha of the BJP which came up with the most novel method of protest. Its members marched to the state secretariat along with 19 dogs—intended as a double dig at the Marxists. One, at CPI(M) Minister for Local Administration V.J. Thankappan who was quoted as saying that dog catching in the municipal and panchayat areas could provide employment to youth. The other, at the 19-member Nayanar Cabinet.

RAJAN PODUVAL



The Muslim league procession

On its part, the Youth Congress (YC-I) march from Kasargod to Trivandrum demanded the resignation of the LDF Government if it could not fulfil its electoral promise of giving a "million jobs to the youth of Kerala". Said Ramesh Chennithala, president of the state YC(I): "It was the biggest show of resentment against the Government in recent times." The Kerala Congress (Mani group) and the Indian Union Muslim League's youth wing also did their share of walking from Kasargod to Trivandrum.

Not to be left behind, the Malayalam film industry too staged a dharna in front of the state secretariat to protest against the existing sales tax and power tariff rates. Meanwhile, lesser political parties are planning new gimmicks to impress the state's people.

A Lesson to Learn

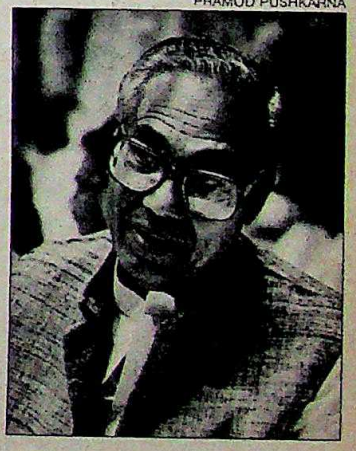
IT'S an old tale with a new—and unfortunate—twist. Universities the country over have had to withstand pressure from unscrupulous politicians. But this time, the academic freedom of the reputed Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda is being threatened by the actions of its own Vice-Chancellor, Professor R.C. Patel, whose arbitrary behaviour has earned him the sobriquet, "Mohammed Tughlaq". Appointed only three months ago by Gujarat Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary to hush up the scandal surrounding his son's marks, Patel may have succeeded in doing that. But he has also stirred up another scandal by victimising independent-minded academicians.

Undeterred by their international standing, Professor K.T.M. Hegde, an environmental archaeologist, was sacked as dean of the art faculty; poet Sitanshu Mehta was ousted as head of the department of Gujarati literature—even as he was in Berlin for a programme under which he was to spend a week with Gunter Grass; and Dr K. Seshadri given marching orders as dean of the English faculty. Comparatively less harsh treatment was meted out to Dr Ganesh Devi and painter Ghulam Mohammed Shaikh. Devi—an English teacher—was withdrawn as a Ph.D. guide and Shaikh asked to vacate his residential premises. Not prepared to take this arbitrariness lying down, the five dons are busy drumming up support for their cause. And a meeting of academicians from Bombay and other places is now being planned in Baroda. Evidently, Vice-Chancellor R.C. Patel has a lot to learn, his exalted position notwithstanding.

Enlightened Scheme

OPERATION Siddhartha is no blood-and-thunder army exercise, nor a quick, surgical commando action intended to destroy a terrorist group. Its intentions are far more pacific. The brainchild of Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad, the Rs 71-crore development scheme backed by the Centre intends, in fact, to raise the socio-economic condition of the poor in three of the state's districts—Jehanabad, Gaya and Aurangabad. Azad's motives, however, are not altogether altruistic: by improving the lot of the downtrodden he also hopes simultaneously to destroy the basis of the grassroots support of the extreme left groups who have been active in the region.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Azad: countering the left

Named after the Buddha, the scheme was given final shape by G.S. Kang, the state secretary in charge of the 20-point programme. However, not everyone in the state shares Kang's enthusiasm for the scheme. Many of its detractors are from the Congress(I) itself. They feel that if the chief minister is so eager to mitigate caste and socio-economic tensions in the region, he should first discontinue his association with a group of upper caste party politicians from the region, collectively known as the 'Jehanabad lobby', which is reported to have a hand in exacerbating social tension.

How diligently the scheme will be implemented should soon be known. Shantipuram, a village formed specially for the Harijan survivors of the 1986 massacre in Kansara village, Jehanabad district, has been chosen to test Operation Siddhartha. Later, in the first phase of the scheme, the Government will spend Rs 31 crore in four months to create the infrastructure for rural development. The land where the Buddha once preached could certainly do with a little help, even if it is only material.

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Vain Attempt at Unity

THE much publicised Bharat Banao rally of the Youth Congress(I) in Amritsar ended as a fiasco last fortnight. Divided into rival groups—one led by its President M.S. Bitta and the other by Vice-President R.S. Bularia—the workers came well-prepared for the rally. Armed with lathis, iron-rods and even firearms, they welcomed the organisation's national President Mukul Vasnik, AICC(I) General Secretary and MP from Amritsar, R.L. Bhatia, and state party chief

RAVI BHANDARI

Youth Congress(I) rallyists: poor show

Beant Singh. The proceedings started with some workers lobbing eggs and vegetables at the leaders. This was followed by an exchange of blows amid loud pro- and anti-Bitta slogans. About 12 partymen were injured before order was restored.

Bularia, a supporter of former chief minister Darbara Singh and arch rival of Beant Singh, alleged that Bitta's men and the police tried to stop his men from attending the rally. Bitta countered this by saying Bularia and his group were "disruptive elements", and so weren't wanted. After Bularia and the Jalandhar district Youth Congress(I) Committee (YCC-I) President Anil Dutta had been physically thrown out of the venue, Bitta announced that more such rallies would be held in each of the state's districts in the coming months. The rally ended with the grand declaration that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was committed to solve the Punjab problem with help from the Youth Congress—a hollow avowal after the day's proceedings.

A Home-Sick Governor

GOVIND Narain Singh may be governor of Bihar but his heart is still in his home state Madhya Pradesh. Last month, for instance, he paid a visit to the pilgrimage centre of Onkareshwar in south-west Madhya Pradesh. But meditation and prayer are not all that Singh has in mind when he visits his home state. The governor puts his trips there to good political use. To campaign against his old adversary, Arjun Singh, for one. And to push forward his own case, for another. He argues, and not very discreetly, that the Congress(I)'s vote-catching campaign won't get the party far as long as Arjun Singh continues to be the state's chief minister. The next election, he declares, is going to be fought on the plank of corruption and the party would not be able to win more than four out of 40 parliamentary seats because the people don't believe that their chief minister is "clean".

G.N. Singh: shrewd

Does that mean that Singh will throw his lot in with former chief minister, Shyama Charan Shukla, who was recently readmitted into the party? Not really. Apparently Singh is no believer in the axiom that the "enemy of my enemy is my friend". His comment to newsmen recently on the possibility of joining hands with Shukla was cryptic: poison kills.

Playing the Hindu Card

WITH the Shiv Sena and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) both favouring a Hindu *rashtra*—one openly, the other covertly—it is not surprising that they are seriously exploring the possibility of an electoral alliance for the next vidhan sabha polls in Maharashtra. The BJP made the first overture at its state convention in Nagpur last month. And Sena supremo, Bal Thackeray, responded in kind. At a huge rally in Bombay's Shivaji Park, he welcomed the BJP to form an alliance.

Political parties lost no time in criticising the proposed alliance. Said the Congress(I)'s Bombay strongman, Murli Deora: "The BJP's secular pretensions are now exposed." And Janata Party's Mrinal Gore asked: "How will a fine man like Vajpayee feel sitting next to Bal Thackeray?" Opposition leaders are understandably alarmed at the BJP's willingness to forge links with the communal Sena. For if the alliance does indeed materialise, other opposition parties—particularly the seven members of the National Front—will have to keep away from the BJP, despite the fact that it has considerable clout in the Hindi belt.

The BJP has its own compulsions for the move. The Sena has eroded the BJP's traditional support base by shifting its main electoral plank from linguistic to religious chauvinism. Even BJP ideologue and MP, Pramod Mahajan, credits the Sena with articulating the Hindu viewpoint effectively: "Hindus feel their pride is hurt and this feeling is voiced by the Sena." Last fortnight, when Thackeray announced that the Sena would celebrate the birth centenary of RSS founder Keshav Hegdewar,

NAMAS BHOJANI

Thackeray: responding to the BJP's overture

RSS cadres asked Mahajan why they should not support the Sena instead of the Janata Party—where Syed Shahabuddin's communalism remains unchecked.

Yet there are many areas on which the BJP and Sena don't see eye to eye. While the BJP has embraced Gandhian socialism and claims to support secularism, Thackeray wants it to renounce both before allying with the Sena. The BJP also disapproves of the Sena's stance towards the Sikhs and Dalits. The most crucial point is—can BJP leaders afford to isolate themselves by joining the Sena?

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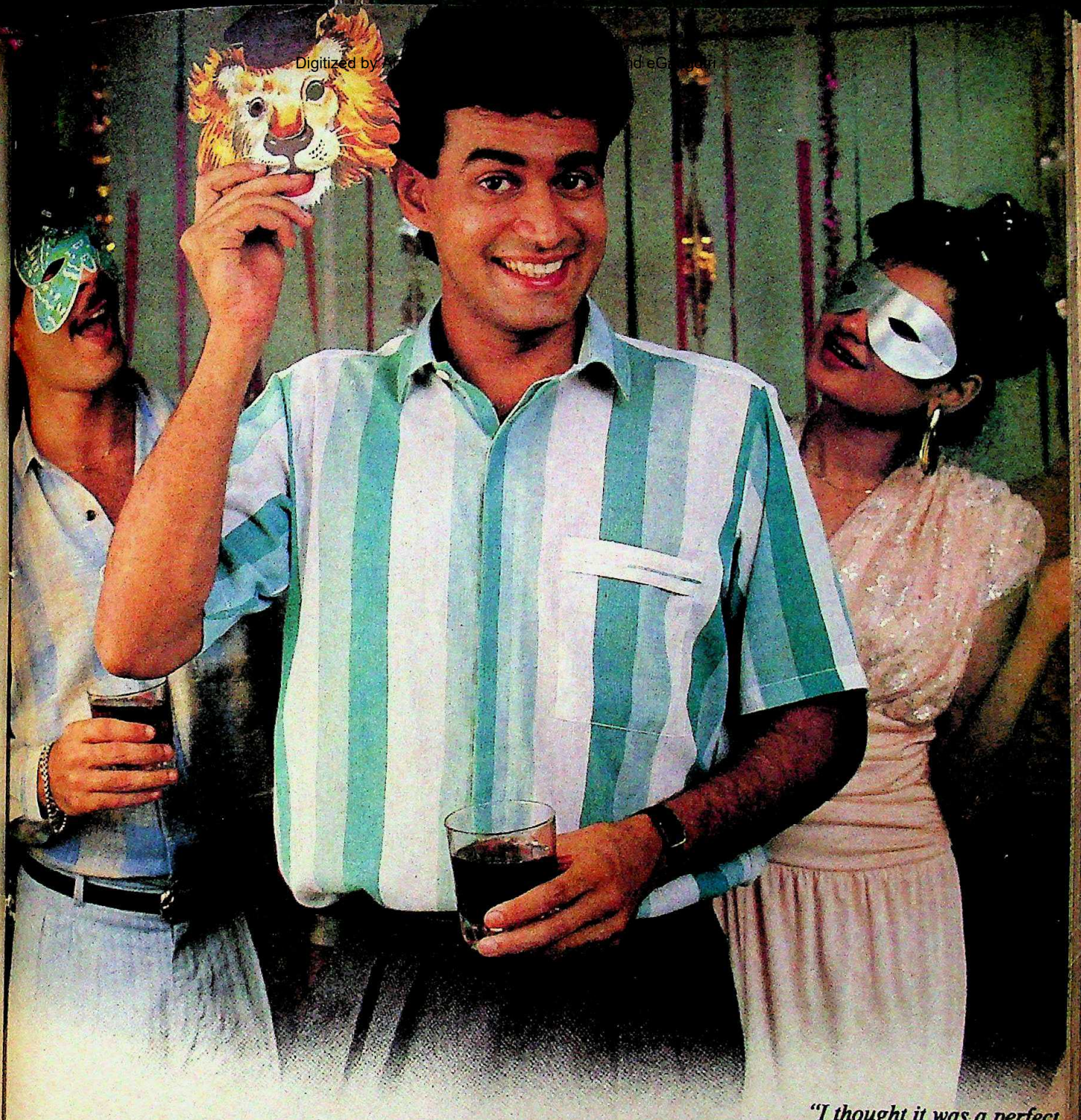

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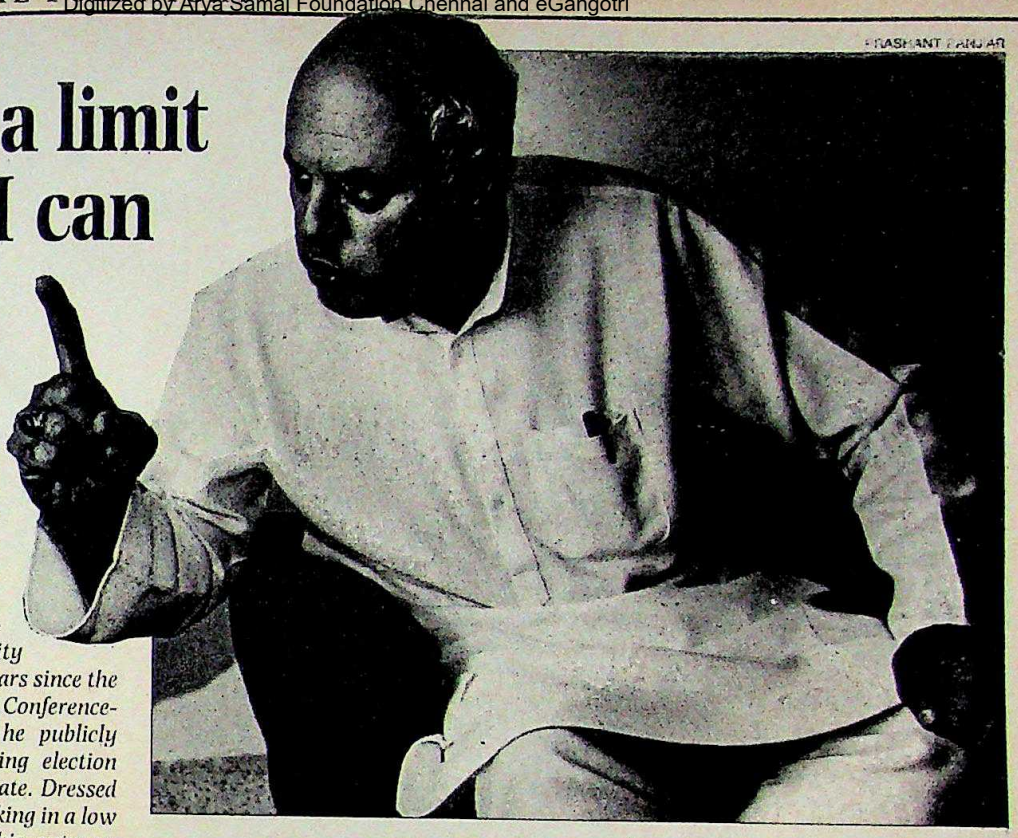
FAROOQ ABDULLAH

"There's a limit to what I can take"


PRASHANT PANJIAR

THE breakdown of law and order, the increasing stridency of fundamentalist demands and the non-performance of the state Government, have combined to push Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah to a corner. In order to deflect some of the criticism, the beleaguered Abdullah counterattacked with a rare ferocity last fortnight—exactly two years since the victory of the ruling National Conference-Congress(I) alliance—when he publicly accused the Centre of breaking election promises and neglecting the state. Dressed in a kurta and salwar and speaking in a low voice that barely controlled his outrage, Abdullah explained the reasons for his anger to Executive Editor INDERJIT BADHWAR.

Q. *Are you angry with Rajiv Gandhi, your alliance partner?*

A. As far as the prime minister is concerned, there's a lot of goodwill from him. He means well. But, as far as this state is concerned, things don't move at the pace he—or I—want them to move.

Q. *What is your main complaint?*

A. There are so many. Take power, for example. The valley is virtually without power. We were promised gas turbines from BHEL by the end of December. Today, they tell us we will have to wait until January end, even longer.

Q. *How much of this is your fault?*

A. These were election promises I made to my people after the alliance with the Congress. Today, I cannot give them LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) or alternate fuel. Supplies promised by the Centre just do not arrive. The Jammu-Srinagar Highway is deteriorating steadily. Heavy rains have made conditions worse. This is our umbilical cord with the rest of India. The only surface link. And we've been screaming for years—for God's sake build an alternate road either via Symthan Kishtwar or Mughal Road over Pir Panchal. And the Banihal Tunnel stands near collapse.

Q. *Is it that serious?*

> "Anyone who forms a government in Kashmir cannot do so without sharing power with New Delhi. But in return they should strengthen my hands."

A. Rice, atta, kerosene, oil are all in short supply. Storages are rapidly diminishing. We hear the Centre has released additional quotas. But I hope to God they reach us before the road collapses.

Q. *But don't you share some of the blame for their woes and for not performing more efficiently?*

A. I know. I'm the one that gets the abuse. But there's a limit to what I can take. Why doesn't the Centre realise this?

Q. *Can you be more specific?*

A. For example, I've been hounding the Government to shift the main petrol dump which is in a thick residential area. They promised to shift it but now want to wait until summer. Even in Alaska people work in the winter. We need the Central teams now. Not in the tourist season.

Q. *So this is one more of your unkept promises?*

A. These are the promises of 1986. Look at the Dulhasti power project. It was supposed to be completed in 1990. It probably won't until 1998. And the costs will double and triple. I've been waiting for installation of transmission lines from Jammu to Kashmir to give us power from the northern grid. Nothing so far. Look at the goodwill of the people that's been lost. This is the kind of thing that is just killing me!

Q. *But don't you take this up with Rajiv Gandhi?*

A. I keep pestering the prime minister. He's a busy man. He means well. But I keep telling him, I've made promises to my people, what will I tell them when they call me to account? He promised last February that the second stage of the Salal power project would soon take off. But nothing has still happened.

Q. *Why does the youth of Kashmir that gave you a landslide electoral victory now demonstrate against you and indulge in unprecedented violence?*

A. There is tremendous frustration among the young. The first day that I took over, I said I'd create more jobs and avenues for them. But where are those jobs and those avenues? How come the Centre's corporations and public enterprises don't recruit from Kashmir when they do from everywhere else?

Q. *Are these youngsters turning*

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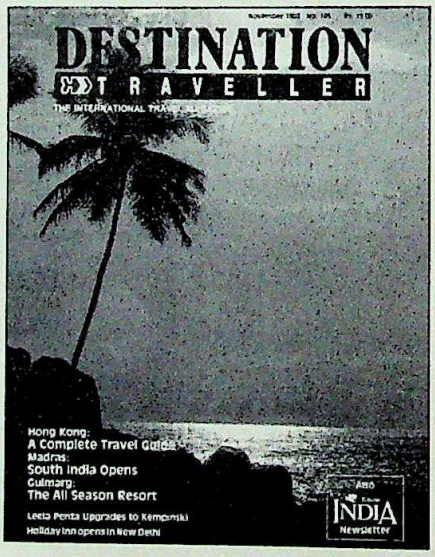

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Abdullah with Rajiv: happier times

against you and the Centre?

A. They've become cannon fodder for fundamentalists and extremists who offer them money. Pakistan's been training them. Thank God we've been able to nab the leaders or the situation here could get worse than Punjab. But by and large, our people have refused to harbour extremists.

Q. *Do they belong to any known organisation?*

A. Some of them are sympathisers of the People's Conference.

Q. *Are you aware that many people feel that some of the recent bombings may be the Government's doing in order to discredit the Opposition and gain sympathy from the Centre?*

A. We have heard this stupid talk. But the bombs that went off in Lal Chowk have convinced people that this is the handiwork of those who want an independent Kashmir and those who want Kashmir to go to Pakistan. I have asked for assistance from the Centre.

Q. *Why do you have to run to the Centre all the time?*

A. Anyone who forms a government in Kashmir cannot do so without sharing power with New Delhi. But in return they should strengthen my hands.

Q. *But the Congress in Kashmir is disgracing itself by feuding publicly. How can a divided party strengthen your hands?*

A. They'll have to settle their house. Earlier, the Congress here belonged only to one man—Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and not to Delhi. For 10 years they gave him all the money he needed. They have to start rebuilding.

> "If we are not able to meet even 10 per cent of the expectations of what we have promised the people of this state, then God help us at the next election."

Q. *Why such concern for the Congress?*

A. If they cannot strengthen their own party and thereby strengthen my hands, there is a chance that this secular coalition will collapse along with me. The danger of that happening in Kashmir is that the entire nation may be faced with communal politics, one type of the Jammu variety, and one type of the Kashmir variety. The nation cannot be allowed to fall apart.

Q. *Do you really believe things have become that serious?*

A. If we are not able to meet even 10 per cent of the expectations of what we have promised the people of this state, then God help us at the next election. I can understand implementation delays. But not delays of years. We had two major floods in July and September. Against our requirement of Rs 100 crore in relief, we got a little over Rs 14 crore, that too during the second damage. What am I to tell my people?

Q. *People also blame you for harbouring men like Power Minister Mula Ram and Revenue Minister P.L. Handoo in your cabinet even though they face serious corruption charges.*

A. The courts and a legislative committee are examining the allegations. If they are true, the two will have no place in my government. But I am against conducting witch hunts.

Q. *How do you plan to fight the inefficiency and paralysis of which your government is accused?*

A. I have made major changes. Department heads are being changed and new ones selected with great care. There will also be major portfolio changes in my cabinet and ministries. And all this is not for the heck of it but because they are meaningful reforms.

Q. *What about the charges—that you only speak for the Muslims?*

A. A lot of people don't like me speaking for the Muslims. But they form the majority in my state. How can I ignore their grievances. If I don't do this, should I leave the task to fundamentalist forces? Should I ignore these matters for so long that a situation occurs for which the nation will never forgive me. The mistrust of Muslims must go, and this cause should be taken up by secularists.

Q. *Do you think the Centre is treating Kashmir like an opposition state?*

A. Well, their attitude towards Jammu and Kashmir, with its special problems, must be different from that towards other states.

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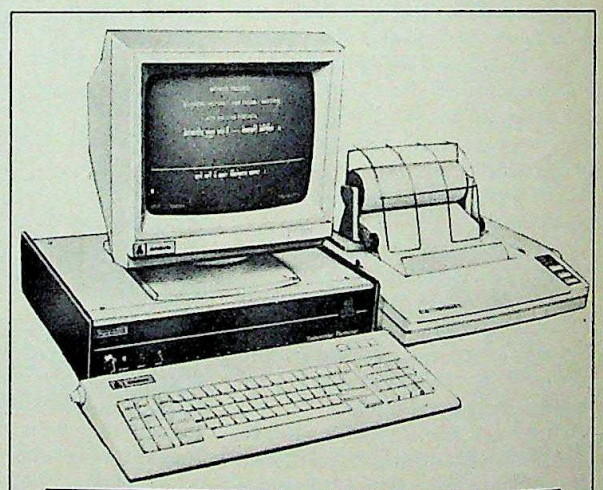

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US ELECTIONS

Mandate for Continuity

George Bush scores a resounding win and becomes the 41st President

WHERE'S George? was the derisive chant from Democrats authored by Senator Edward Kennedy at the Democratic convention in Atlanta last July, alluding to Vice-President George Bush's assertions that he was absent during the hatching of the Iran-Contra conspiracy. It launched Michael Dukakis in the presidential race with a healthy 17 per cent lead over his rival in opinion polls.

On November 8, American voters gave a resounding answer: George Bush is in the White House. The 41st President of the United States is once again a Republican, extending the party's occupancy of the White House to 24 years minus the nearly-forgotten four of Democrat Jimmy Carter. This has strengthened the political myth that when it comes to presidency, Democrats are incapable of capturing it (A Democrat wryly remarked that Democrats had made losing presidency into an art form). Why a myth? Because the electorate turned around and gave Democrats even greater control of the legislative bodies.

Analyses of why Bush won so big—or why Dukakis lost so badly—are already pouring in, and will continue to for some time. Indeed, in this electronic election, where pollsters have had a field-day predicting a Bush win for the past several weeks, some observers had already offered their analyses as to why Dukakis lost—all before a single vote was cast. Quick statistics, however, show two things clearly: The Bush victory is a continuation of sorts of the Reagan incumbency with overwhelming support from the traditional Republican stronghold of white, male, suburban and rural voters, and, secondly, the Dukakis defeat is a palpable failure to secure the votes of depressed urbanites and minorities.

Subject to results from Alaska and Hawaii, George Bush carried 39 of the 50 states, giving him 426 electoral votes, with Michael Dukakis counting 11 states and district of Columbia (National Capital Area) and 112 electoral votes. A candidate needs 270 electoral votes to become President. America's "heartland" comprising the south and much of midwest, voted solidly for Bush, and even maximal California went for him. Dukakis's consolation was that he squeaked through in New York and won handsomely in his home state of Massachussetts.

Among the more prominent highlights of the 1988 US presidential election are: a marked lowering of campaigning standards leading to acute voter disappointment, a huge escalation in total expenditure which opened the doors wider to special-interest groups (called political action committees) to obfuscate real issues, a searing effect on the democratic process of the professional image-makers and, inferentially, of television and radio, and a perceptible darkening of the image of American people as an enlightened electorate. Unfortunately for American democracy, the virus of "faddism" (exaggerated but temporary attraction) has infected the political system. The superficiality of the Ronald Reagan style is not the culprit: the American fascination with "good" news to the exclusion of "bad" is.

George Bush, integral part of an administration that piled up a trillion dollars in public debt in eight short years, not only skirted the issue of the deficit during campaigning, but promised no new taxes and reduction in capital gains tax. In 1980, when running against Ronald Rea-

Bush (far right) with vice-president elect Quayle: persisting doubts

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gan for the Republican nomination, he called this "Voodoo economics", but now has enthusiastically committed its extension. Apparently, his advisers or "handlers" have shrewdly concluded that what made Reagan so popular was not his "Teflon" style but that America has a Teflon electorate.

However, if Bush chooses to read, there already is a writing on the wall. First, it reads that—thanks to his negative and at times vicious campaign against Dukakis—there would be no traditional "honeymoon" period with the Democrat-controlled Congress. Second, Jimmy Carter can no longer be blamed for the ills facing the country, since the "previous" administration was his and Reagan's. Third, the nation (currently an euphemism for the all-powerful media) would not allow him any preparation or groundwork time because he has promised "continuity". And, fourth, his presidency would be straitjacketed if he does not tackle as his first job the amelioration of the divisiveness among people created by the worst presidential campaign ever.

It is equally clear that the negativism and divisiveness which served him well against Michael Dukakis will not work in running his government or dealing with the outside world. This aspect will, of course, be of particular interest to India.

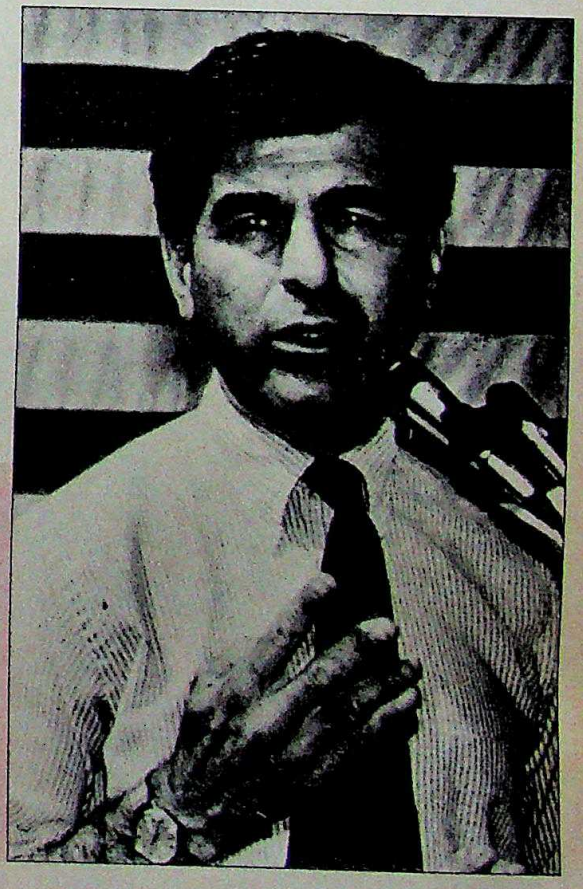
On a broad scale, Bush is committed to continuing the Reagan administration's policies towards South Asia, specifically including Washington's "special" relationship with Islamabad. Hopefully, with the pull-out of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and installation of a democratic government in Pakistan, the Bush administration could focus on what Republicans like to consider as (India and more so China) a potentially vast market for American goods. Much, however, will depend on who handles US foreign policy on a day-to-day basis.

NOTWITHSTANDING earlier pressure that he should launch a smooth administration as chief of the White House staff, James Baker, Bush's campaign chairman and closest confidant, succeeded George Shultz as secretary of state. Two years ago, as treasury secretary, Baker had pressed the World Bank and other rich nations to inject massive financial aid to the Third World countries to stimulate their economies. Would he carry such sentiments to his job at the State Department? According to those who know him, Baker is likely to recommend tougher policies against countries, Third World or not, who either have protected economies and or do not lend support to America's geopolitical interests. Unless George Bush as President undergoes metamorphosis from George Bush as ex-vice-president and presidential candidate, Baker is expected to enjoy a much freer hand in running US foreign policy than his predecessor. In the likelihood of Baker allowing America's pocketbook to determine its bilateral relations with other nations, India's potential as a big and progressively accessible market bodes well for Indo-US relations. With even the bastions of communism introducing selective capitalism, the pragmatic Baker would have no fear that this potential could disappear with the Rajiv Gandhi era.

As ex-treasury secretary, Baker is also worried at the likely emergence of western Europe as a unified economic power, further shrinking the share in the world market for US industry. Fortunately for the rest of the world, both Bush and his secretary of state believe that power does not come from the gun as much as economic strength, and this portends a vigorous pursuit of overseas markets.

Among the other "likelys" in the Bush administration: former Texas senator John Tower as Secretary of Defence, Nicholas Brady to continue as Secretary of Treasury, as also Richard Thornburgh as Attorney-General, General Brent Scowcroft as National Security Adviser, and Craig Fuller as White House Chief of Staff. Some Bush advisers are suggesting that he appoint one or more Democrats to his cabinet to defuse hostility with democratic legislators.

What kind of President would Bush make? He may have won by a near landslide, but Bush as President-elect has



Dukakis: a palpable failure to secure minority votes

It is clear that the negativism which served Bush well against Dukakis will not work in running his government or dealing with the outside world. This aspect will be of particular interest to India.

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not dispelled doubts in a large section of his constituency as to his capabilities. Thus far, his record is that of a follower—ambassador to the United Nations, then to Beijing, director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a faithful vice-president to Ronald Reagan—rather than of a leader. Indeed, Michael Dukakis has more leadership experience from six years of governorship. Now, suddenly as it were, Bush has to lead a whole nation and a large section of the pro-West world.

Bush made much of branding his opponent as a liberal, deliberately implying that Dukakis somehow was less patriotic, soft on crime and weak on defence issues. This may have enthused the conservatives who oppose abortions and want a gun under every armpit. But, according to some pundits who claim to know him, no one whose name is George Herbert Walker Bush or who graduated from "liberal" Yale University or who was raised in the gentle, affluent environs of Connecticut, could at heart be a classic conservative. They expect Bush to leave day to day running of the country to his cabinet and advisers, but be much more involved than Ronald Reagan. They also believe Bush is not averse to compromising—unlike his predecessor— and would be doing a lot of it with the Congress to carry forward his agenda (Apart from remnants of the outgoing Reagan Administration, what this "agenda" is, nobody clearly knows.)

Next time I want to vote *for* someone!

As far as minorities (including Indians) are concerned, they can expect little change. In fact, if Bush appoints conservatives to replace three liberal Supreme Court justices who are likely to retire soon, civil rights that protect minorities could get diluted. Which way Bush leans will ultimately be decided by what he and his advisers believe won this election—appealing to the conservative Americans or the continuation of borrowed prosperity under Reagan.

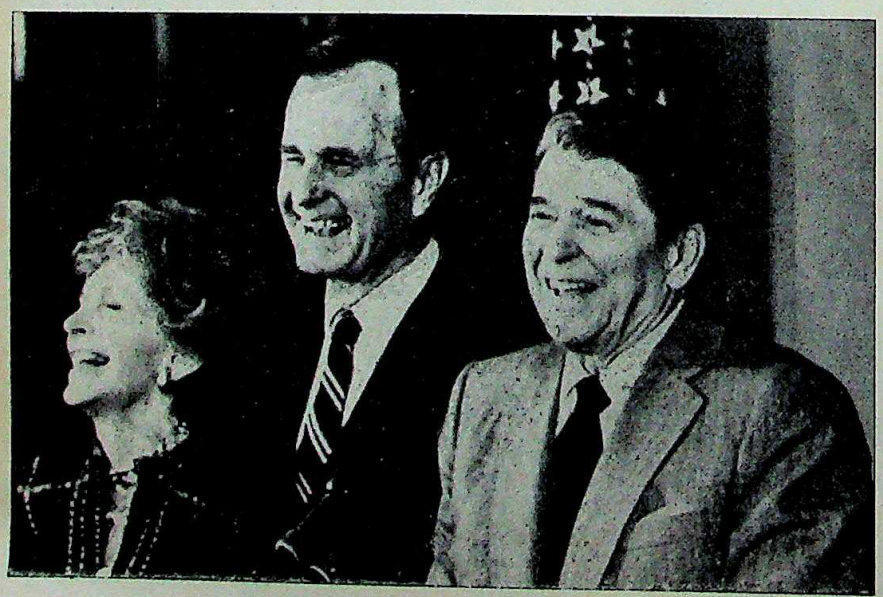
A paradox of the election results is that though Bush won handily, the electorate has apparently denied his plea for a "mandate". Voters have sent him a clear message by firmly favouring Democrats as senators and representatives: After the Reagan profligacy, they want the presidency bridled.

This election, more than any other US presidential election, has highlighted the inordinately powerful role the media has appropriated to itself in determining who sits in the White House. Gone are the days when just Gallup and Harris polls used to report on who leads in public opinion and forecast the winner. Now every newspaper and television network worth its name incessantly feeds a disgusted public its reading of the public mind and analyses. By sampling the opinion of a few hundred "likely" voters among millions, they declare who is "in trouble", who is ahead and who is "underdog". Millions of dollars are spent on advertising by the candidates in reaction to the public's perception as reported by the media, and the monster feeds on itself.

Worse, in spite of repeated criticism and warnings by law-makers, television networks, like kids at a candy store, vie with each other in projecting winners from "exit polls" (asking voters outside polling stations about who their choice was). In another country, this may not create any problem. But in US, there are time zones, ranging from one to three hours, with Los Angeles three hours behind New York. Though they promised otherwise after the 1984 elections, all major networks jumped the gun and declared Bush the "overwhelming winner" even while voters were going to the polls in places like San Francisco and Las Vegas.

As one critic put it, the American media is not satisfied merely in shaping the next President. It also wants to manipulate his identity.

—AMRIT KAKARIA in New York



The president-elect flanked by Nancy and Ronald Reagan: triumphant mood

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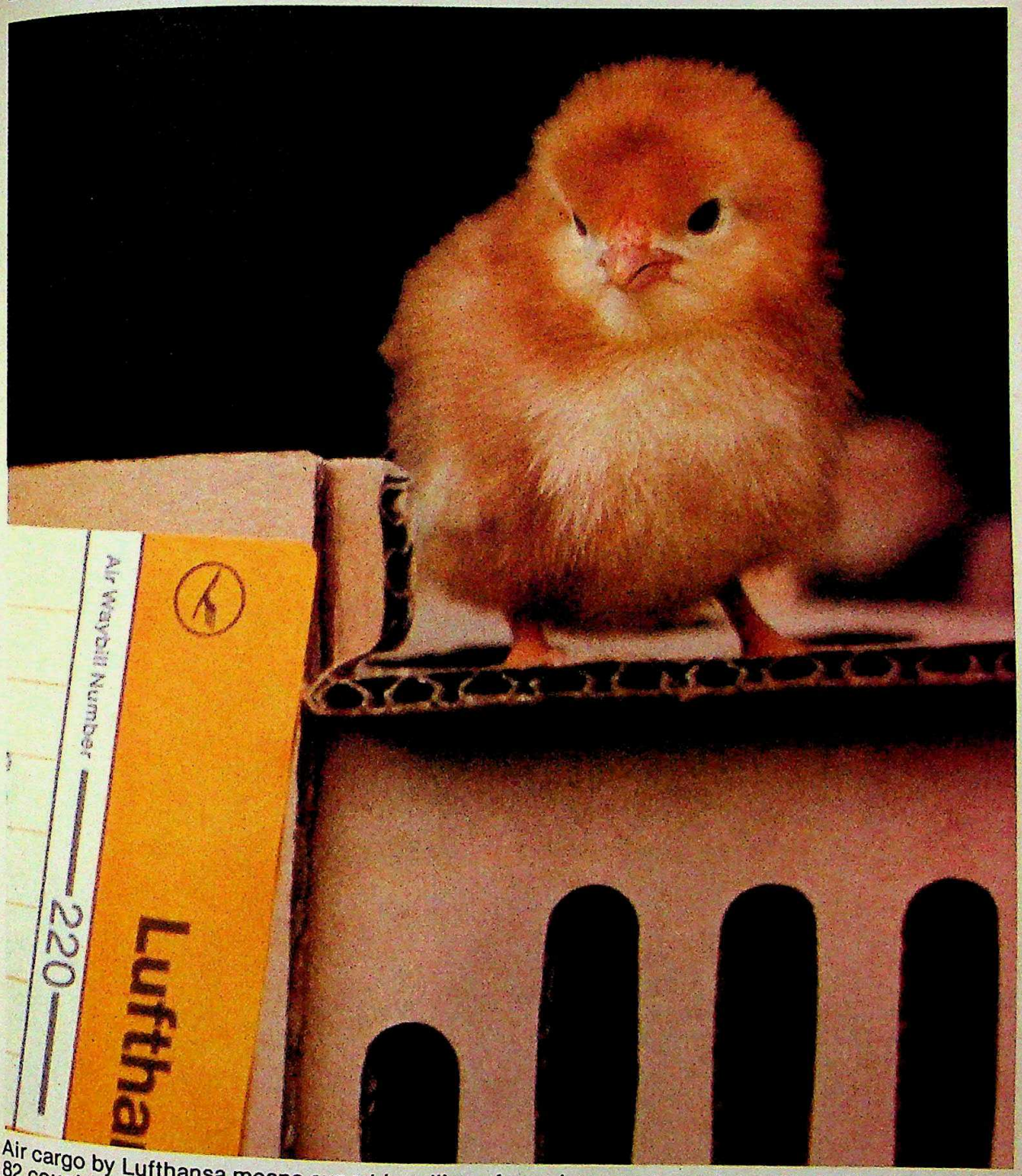

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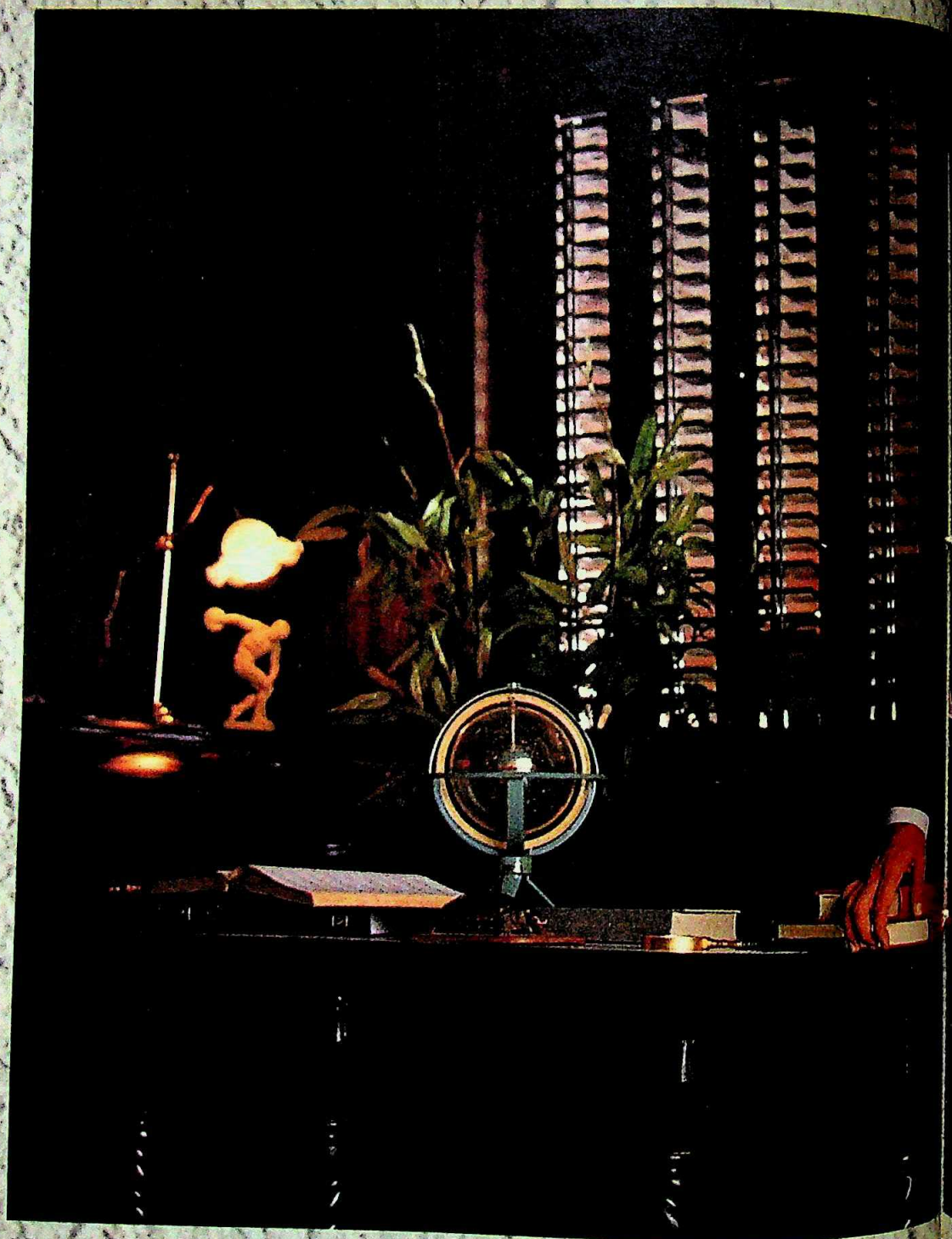

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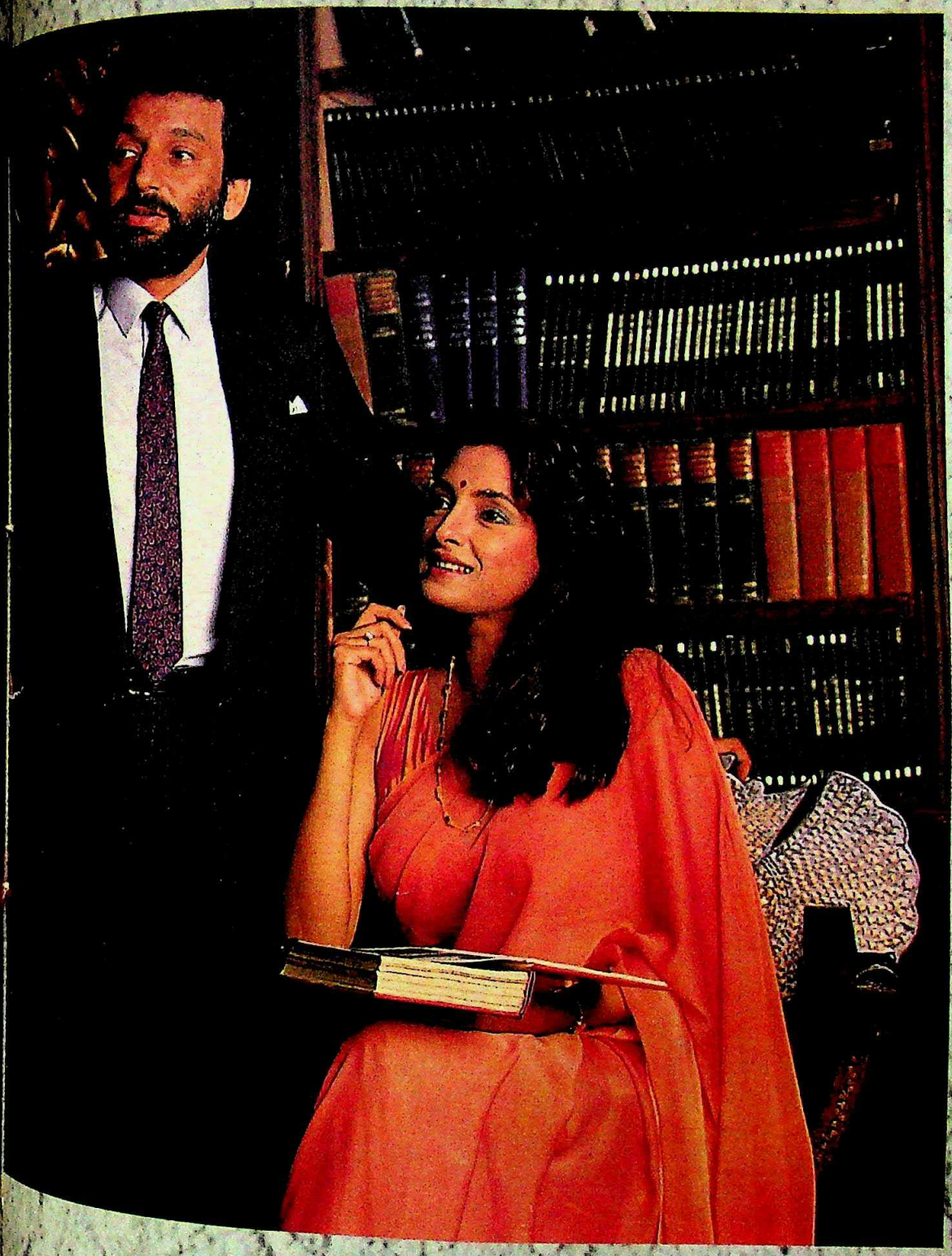

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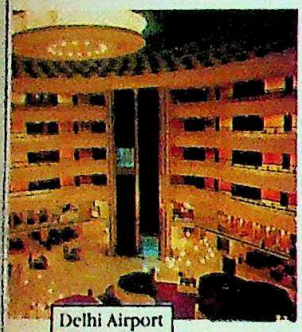

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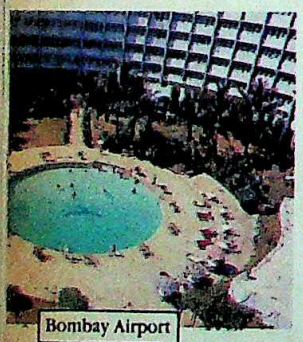

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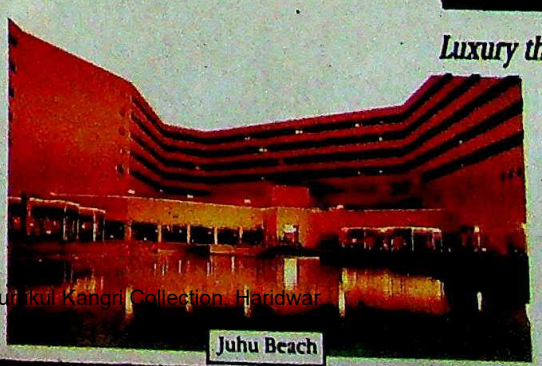

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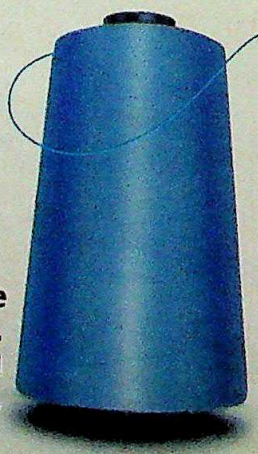

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LATEST TARGET

IS Reliance Industries eyeing yet another corporation, after its coup at Larsen & Toubro? Speculation persists that the textile giant's latest target is Bombay Suburban Electric Supply (BSES) Ltd. Reliance contradicts all this, but a BSES spokesman refuses to either confirm or deny that a move is on to induct Reliance. Bombay Suburban has submitted a proposal to the Government to put up a Rs 750-crore power plant at Dahanu near Bombay. New Delhi is apparently keen on involving the Ambanis in the 500 mw project. The venture is to be financed by the International Finance Corporation, a World Bank affiliate. Two options are being talked about: Reliance will have a stake in a new BSES subsidiary that could be formed for the purpose, or acquire equity in the power company itself. The financial institutions hold 67 per cent of BSES equity—the rest is distributed among 6,000 shareholders, including members of the public—and are reportedly under pressure to smoothen the way for Reliance's entry into Bombay Suburban.

STATUS QUO

IN recent weeks, the media have zeroed in on a multi-crore question: who'll bag Best & Crompton? The answer, it seems, is that no one will—for the moment. The professionally managed company (in which the financial institutions have a controlling interest) has been hotly pursued by the Thapars and the Madras-based Tube Investments group. Earlier, the Hindujas had been in the reckoning. The Madras-based company became a take-over candidate as it required fresh working capital of around Rs 6 crore. The banks would not lend it, on the ground that Best & Crompton made profiits and paid dividends. So the idea of hawking some equity surfaced. However, the financial institutions have now decided that the engineering company's cash problems aren't insurmountable—and so have deferred the question of a take-over.

CASH CRUNCH

IN an attempt to raise money to run its heavily-losing textiles division, the troubled DCM is selling assets and seeking bank loans. It has hawked office space—three of the five floors it owned in a new multi-storeyed complex—in the heart of New Delhi for Rs 7.5 crore. DCM has also approached Punjab National Bank for a Rs 6-crore loan. The aim: to rustle up over Rs 12 crore for the textiles division. Meanwhile, DCM has closed the first mill it opened, in the walled city of Delhi.

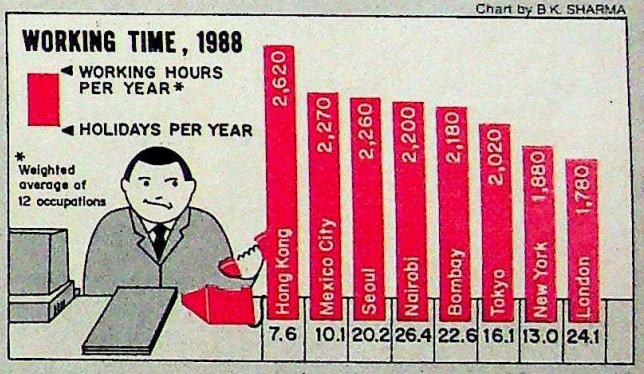
MERGER MOVE

THE Government has cleared an application by Tata group associate Forbes, Forbes Campbell and Company to merge six investment firms—Kay Distillery Industries, Forbes Investments, Forbes Finance, Ritchie Steart Investments, Perfect Extrusions and Forbes Trustees—with it. Set up over 15 years ago, the firms are said to have outlived their utility. Reasons: they were too small to undertake new projects, and owing to their links with big business, new ventures would require government approval. Also, due to interlocked shareholdings, the parent company's tax liabilities went up. But two other investment companies of Forbes, Forbes Campbell have not been merged. Warrior Investments and Latham Finances have (together with Gokak Patel) set up a textile mill in Indonesia, their separate identities therefore being maintained.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

THERE have been complaints that employee productivity in Bombay isn't much to write home about. Not true. Bombayites put in more hours on the job than workers in 15 other cities in the world. These include Tokyo—clearly. Bombayites work longer than even the Japanese—Rio de

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Janerio, Johannesburg and New York—in that order. Citing a recent Union Bank of Switzerland study, *The Economist* reports that Hong Kongers get top billings, followed by Mexico City, Seoul, Nairobi and Bombay (*see chart*). But, in line with the Indian trend, Bombayites take an awful lot of holidays.

SLOW CONNECTION

WHEN Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) was set up two years ago to run the telephone systems in Bombay and Delhi, there was hope that it would trim waiting-lists for connections and ensure that telephones worked. MTNL had promised to invest Rs 1,600 crore between 1987 and 1990 in the telephone systems of the two cities. But the pace of investment has slowed down and almost 40 per cent fewer new connections are being installed in both cities this year. Part of the problem is that the Mankapur unit of the public sector Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) is producing fewer lines than had been projected. According to one estimate, it turned out 1.78 lakh lines last year; the target was 3 lakh. But the culprit isn't ITI. Last year, a wing of the Industry Ministry questioned a price escalation clause in the 1984 agreement between ITI and its foreign collaborator. So permission to ITI to import equipment was delayed. Evidently, it takes more than MTNL to ring out the old styles of functioning.

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THE ECONOMY

Looking Good...but

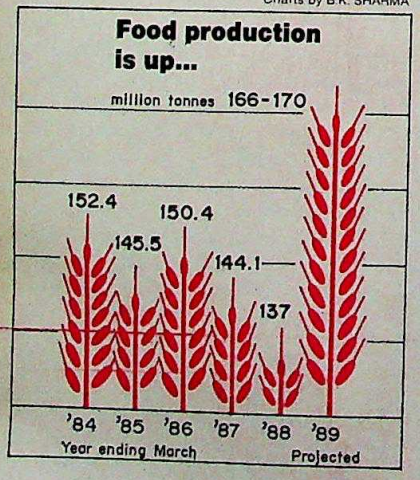
Outlook is bright but fundamental problems persist

PRIME Minister Rajiv Gandhi could not have wished for a better pre-election year. A bumper food crop is on the anvil. Despite periodic hiccups, the stock-market is going through the roof, prices appear, for the time being, under control, companies are not doing badly at all, and even industries which had fared indifferently over the last few years (for instance, fertiliser and cement) have perked up. And though the overall mood among businessmen and economists is not quite euphoric—it's cautiously optimistic—many believe the good times should last for at least a couple of months.

The signs of a boom are visible. Key infrastructural areas such as power and freight movement are in robust health. With reservoirs abrim, the power position is comfortable. N. Vaghul, chairman of the state-owned Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI), points out that commercial vehicle sales are climbing, signifying that more goods are being moved—an important index of the economy's well-being. Light commercial vehicle production in the first quarter of this year was up by 20 per cent compared with last year's first quarter. In the same time span, the railways have moved 3.7 per cent more freight.

Other core areas are also flourishing. Between April and July this year, saleable steel production shot up by 14.5 per cent as against last year. So did coal output, though more modestly. Cement production in May and June rose by over 17 per cent in relation to the figures for 1987, evidently indicating that excess production capacities are less of a headache now as housing picks up.

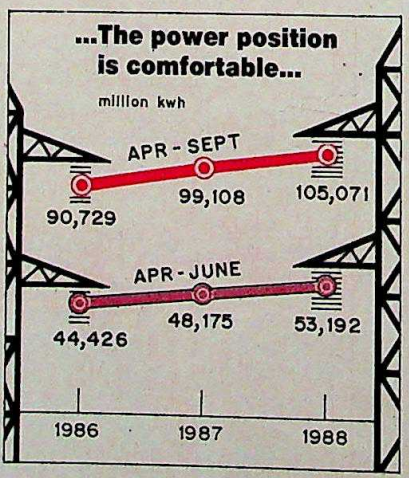
Charts by B.K. SHARMA



The sunny news, however, is marred by clusters of dark clouds. The economy's deep-rooted problems persist: the domestic and foreign debt burden, inflation, the trade deficit, the precarious foreign exchange reserves position and sickness in industry, to name just a few. What also remains unclear is whether the current upswing will be as pronounced as in 1986-87, a year that saw industrial output grow by over 9 per cent. This will be known only by early next year.

But there is no denying that the latest economic upturn is different from the upswing between 1984 and 1986, when for the first time in recent decades industrial production grew annually by more than 8 per cent for three consecutive years. This was not merely a consequence of good rainfall. The new government had then raised high hopes with its liberalisation policies; this is no longer a factor in the expectations game.

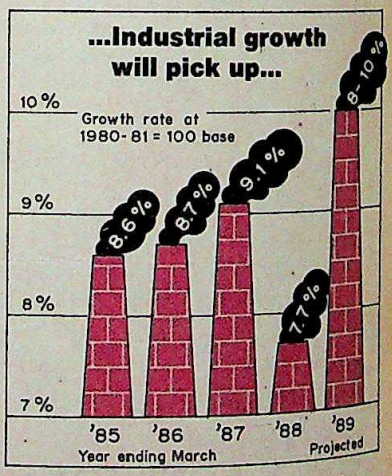
This time the sense of hope in the Government and the business community is fuelled by one overriding factor: Indra, the rain God, has cast his benevolent gaze on the country after three long years. "I will be surprised if foodgrain production falls below 166 million tonnes in 1988-89; the figure may even touch 170 million tonnes, which will be substantially higher than the 1983-84 peak of 152.4 million tonnes," exults Nitin Desai, the Government's chief economic adviser.



Higher agricultural production should help put the lid on prices. Argues C. Rangarajan, deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI): "By this time last year, the wholesale price index was up by 8.3 per cent, but the increase this year has only been 5.4 per cent. My hunch is that, at worst, the rate of inflation in 1988-89 will be somewhere between 7 per cent and 8 per cent." Adds ICICI's Vaghul: "If we can't check inflation this year, then we can never do it."

While several are less sanguine about the Government's efforts to keep the rate of inflation below last year's 10.6 per cent increase in the wholesale price index, the industrial outlook seems reasonably good till the first quarter of next year. "Industrialists are, by and large, in an upbeat mood," notes Vaghul.

He's right. Forecasts Raunaq Singh, vice-president of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), which represents big business: "I think the industrial growth rate will be between 11 per cent and 12 per cent this year. The prospects are excellent." Sum-



ming up industry assessments, Tata Sons Director Freddie A. Mehta adds: "I expect the economy to pick up in the short run. The Government's policies of liberalisation should continue. I notice that even the opposition parties are not talking any more about nationalising private business."

Share price indices have been quick to celebrate the mood in the industry. The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) index, for instance, gained an astonishing 285 points between March and October-end, when it topped 675. And that's for starters, if BSE President Govind Bhai Desai is to be believed. Says he: "The index is ex-

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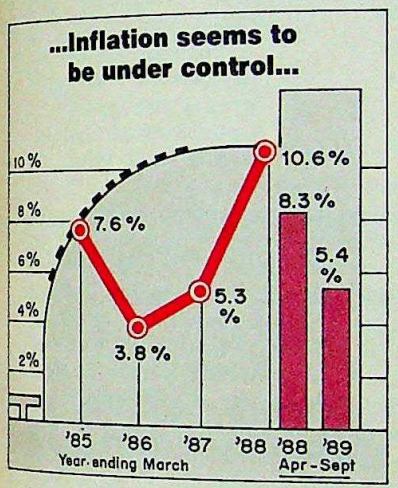
pected to cross 900 by next March and may even come close to the magic 1,000 mark."

There's reason for such unfettered joy. According to Desai, the hangover of the 1987 drought persists, and the good monsoon's impact will be felt only next year. But industrial sectors directly linked to agriculture are already experiencing the fall-out of the good harvest.

The fertiliser industry was saddled with worryingly large stocks for the last 18 months. These are fast disappearing. Though the Government predicts that fertiliser consumption this year will be 9.1

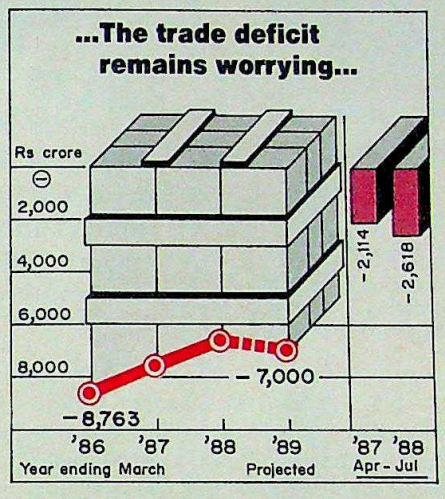


million tonnes, half a million more than last year's 8.6 million tonnes, the industry expects it to cross 10 million tonnes. This year, farmers are expected to buy one lakh tractors, 17,000 more than last year.

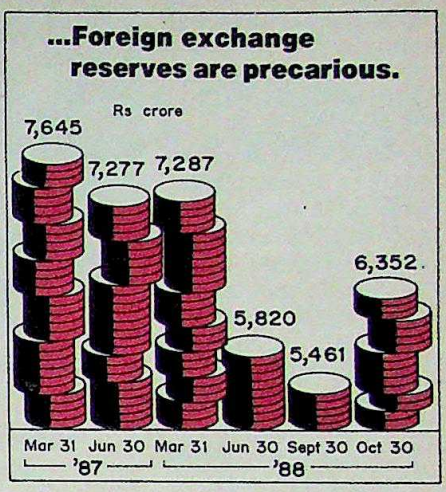
Other industrial sectors too are looking up. More consumer goods and consumer durables are expected to be sold in semi-urban and rural areas. Seven two-wheeler manufacturers have already reported in their latest balance sheets a combined sales increase of nearly 30 per cent.

Even the once-troubled pharmaceutical industry seems to have crossed the hump. "Pharmaceutical sales are booming," says Ajay Piramal, who heads the Bombay-based Nicholas Laboratories. And in the paper industry, the raw materials position is better today than what it has been for the last four years. As a result, paper mills are putting their production capacities to better use than they have for a long time.

In some cases, export prospects are bolstering the collective optimism. The ICICI chairman says that the outlook for exports in the engineering and chemicals industries is better than ever before.



The odd ones out are, of course, the jute and textile industries; both are in sick bay. "The recent performance of textile mills in the organised sector is pretty dismal," says R.L.N. Vijaya Nagar, secretary-general of the Millowners' Federation, Bombay. "Despite the prosperous agricultural season, textile sales have not gone up as expected. Till end-October, the bumper cotton crop had not exercised a benign influence on prices." In 1986-87, 15 of the 18 mills that are federation members had earned profits before depreciation. Last year, however, the number plummeted to 12. And this year may be no different.

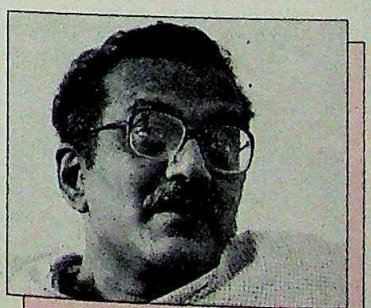


Meanwhile, several industrialists are apprehensive about other issues. "The biggest problem for manufacturing industry is raw material supplies, which in turn are partially related to imports," contends Vinod Doshi, chairman of Premier Automobiles. "The foreign exchange situation is worrying and if the Government panics and starts opening and shutting doors to imports, things can go haywire."

There's cause for concern here. The trade deficit shows few signs of narrowing and the country's foreign exchange position is grave because, among other things, India's loan repayments to the International Monetary Fund peak this year. Next year too, repayment obligations are high. Obviously, the position will remain almost as precarious.

To put this into perspective, for most of last year the country had just enough hard currency to sustain imports for three months. While the RBI's Rangarajan feels that this level of reserves is "adequate", others disagree. "The kinds of concessions given to non-resident Indians for purchasing the bonds recently floated by the State Bank of India is a clear indication of the signs of desperation on the foreign exchange front," says an independent Bombay-based financial consultant.

Some businessmen are also worried by the steady depreciation of the rupee vis-a-vis other currencies. An internal study by a foreign bank predicts that one pound sterling may be equivalent to Rs 50 in five years' time. Rangarajan says that this should not



"Grain production may touch 170 million tonnes, which is higher than the 1983-84 peak."

NITIN DESAI
chief economic adviser
Finance Ministry

"The industrial growth rate will be between 11 and 12 per cent. The prospects are excellent."

RAUNAQ SINGH
vice-president
FICCI

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cause undue consternation since the "real effective exchange rate" of the rupee (after taking into account inflation levels in different countries) is much higher than what the "nominal" rates of exchange seem to suggest.

Even so, the rupee's depreciation could raise the price of imported wares and ultimately tell on domestic prices. That this hasn't happened so far is because international oil and edible oil prices have remained low. But the position could change. World petrochemical prices have shot up, as have metal prices. Economists like Prabhat Patnaik at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, therefore, argue that the rupee's depreciation will have an inflationary effect on the economy in the long run.

"The BSE share price index (at 699 points last fortnight) could cross 900 by next March."
GOVIND BHAI DESAI
president
Bombay Stock Exchange

"I won't be surprised at all if we again have a bout of double digit inflation."
HARISH MAHINDRA
industrialist

Inflation is indeed the major worry. Says industrialist Harish Mahindra: "I won't be surprised if we again have a bout of double-digit inflation." Prices usually drop every year between October and January, but the decline wasn't significant last month. "The seasonal price decline in October has not been pronounced. This seems to indicate that the price situation is still very difficult," warns Patnaik. Moreover, the wholesale price index climbed by 7.5 per cent between April and early October this year. Government economists reserve comment, preferring to wait till January.

The problem of prices is a tricky one. If the Government keeps prices under check, it will gain mass votes. But a certain rate of inflation is also necessary to keep the stock-markets buoyant, particularly since much of the industrial growth in India has been traditionally fuelled by inflation. "In the Indian context, prices are unfortunately not determined by market forces of demand and supply, but by marches and *morchas*," says Freddie Mehta.

D.T. Lakdawala, former deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, believes that only if next year's agricultural season is good will the economy really revive. "Two good years, not one, make all the difference," he cautions. The septuagenarian Calcutta-based economist Bhabatosh Datta adds a sobering thought: "To merely talk of a record food output is misleading because we are calculating the increase from a low base—the fact is that if we actually touch the 165-million-tonne food production mark, we will only be climbing back to the target which was set for the seventh plan."

If food output is up, stocks are down, from a high of 23 million tonnes by the end of June 1987 to roughly 12 million tonnes now. Bank credit for foodgrain procurement has slumped dramatically, while non-food credit has gone up. This situation is likely to be reversed as the Government attempts to beef up the food buffer, thus squeezing the flow of funds to industry and trade to that extent.

There are unquestionably, several other grey areas. There are pointers to an alarming budget deficit this year. When the then finance minister N.D. Tiwari presented his budget last February, the Government's net borrowing from the Reserve Bank (one index of the degree of deficit financing) was pegged at Rs 7,484 crore. Before the middle of the financial year, the figure had topped Rs 5,000 crore.

What's more, the Government is neither curtailing subsidies nor going on a slimming exercise. Finally, the long-term problems look daunting. As Datta notes: "The highly-skewed pattern of income distribution, the sharp regional imbalances, unemployment, industrial sickness, the relation between the public and private sectors—these are all crucial issues which cannot be resolved in a year or two or even in five years."

Obviously, today's optimism is tempered with caution. A bad monsoon next year could take the country back to square one. There is also the feeling that electoral compulsions could compel the Government to chart a populist course, throwing the country's finances even more out of gear.

At the moment, however, the signals are green and the economy is in good shape. The rest is up to the prime minister—and the imperatives of the coming elections.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA with bureau reports

CORPORATE PROFITS: NOT BAD
(First half of 1988-89)

Industry	No. of companies	Gross profit to sales 1987-88	1988-89
Automobiles & Auto Ancillaries	14	9.9	9.5
Cement	8	6.1	6.2
Chemicals & Petro-chemicals	40	9.2	11.6
Electrical Equipment	18	10.5	10.2
Glass & Pottery	6	11.9	15.0
Machinery Manufacture	26	7.2	7.7
Metal Products (Non-Ferrous)	5	7.3	9.5
Metal Products (Ferrous)	19	8.1	8.8
Rubber Products	3	10.2	10.4
Textiles	17	6.5	4.1
Miscellaneous	7	11.5	12.0
All Industries	201	8.4	8.8

Figures in percentage

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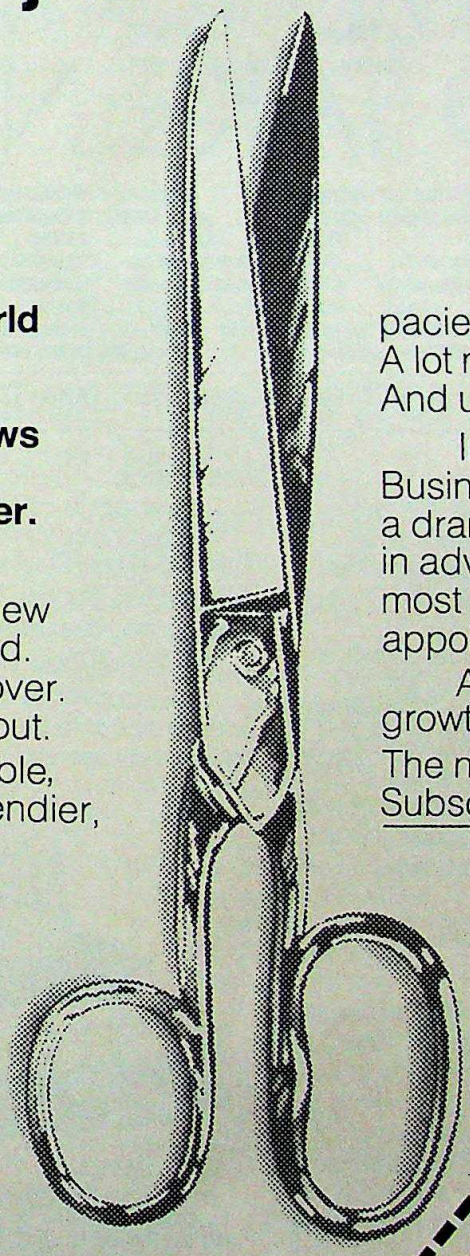

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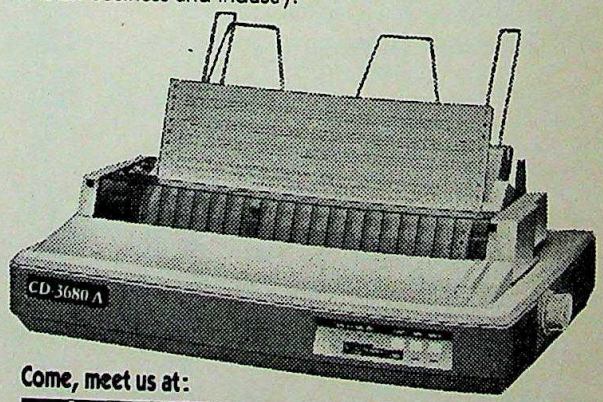

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ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCES

Development Dilemma

Debate over project delays by Environment Ministry

MORE than six years ago, an awareness of the environment started gaining ground in India. Whenever corporate projects threatened to mutilate nature, citizen's groups and local residents launched protest movements, sometimes with mixed results. But the controversy finally prompted the Government to tighten its project clearance procedures. The Department of Environment was converted into a full-fledged ministry and it began vetting projects for their environmental impact.

Today, controversy is back—for quite different reasons. Companies are complaining about the inordinately long time the ministry takes to clear their projects. As many as 115 big and small power, mining, chemical and steel projects have been held up by the ministry—for nearly five years, in a few cases. Nearly all are promoted by state-owned enterprises, and nearly all the big ones are power projects (*see chart*).

Furthermore, the delays have split the Environment Ministry down the middle, with technical experts insisting that the rules should be adhered to and bureaucrats arguing that development goals must be kept in mind.

Sometimes the delays can mean huge cost overruns for companies. For example, the delay in clearing the public sector National Thermal Power Corporation's (NTPC) project at Talcher in Orissa has jacked up the plant's cost by over Rs 150 crore, from Rs 1,300 crore in 1984 to Rs 1,480 crore in February 1988, when it was finally cleared. Again, in 1985 the cost for K.K. Birla's Aravali Fertilisers Ltd was put at Rs 690 crore. In 1988, the bill has soared to Rs 764 crore—and the fertiliser company is still preparing another environment report.

But the view from the other side of the fence is that environmental safeguards are finally coming into play. Said an Environment Ministry functionary: "The corporate world has always regarded environmental clearances as a mere formality. For the first time someone is questioning their total disregard of nature."

The delays have split the Environment Ministry down the middle, with technical experts insisting that the rules should be adhered to and bureaucrats arguing that development goals must be kept in mind.

The crux of the problem is the lengthy project clearance procedures *(see chart)*. For most ventures, the Government demands three clearances: a so-called forest clearance if forest-covered land is involved; clearance relating to pollution control and sanction for a rehabilitation scheme if the project displaces people.

Companies maintain that on an average it takes anywhere from eight months to two years to obtain the Government's nod. Complains M.A. Hai, technical director, NTPC: "A request for forest clearance has to pass through eight levels of the bureaucracy. It is unimaginable."

The corporate world also points an accusing finger at the state environment departments or pollution control boards and claims that they are the worst culprits. Says a harassed fertiliser company executive: "You have to sit around and plead with them to clear your project. Even a single query from their side means that your project gets delayed by three months as the matter goes down the bureaucratic ladder."

Plainly, companies believe that the official dawdling is uncalled for and that the Government indulges in nit-picking. The charge is not entirely unfounded. A transmission line in Maharashtra was delayed for 35 months just because it passed over 150 metres of notified forest land. Says NTPC's Hai: "In many places, the forest land may not have a single tree but only a few shrubs. Yet, because it is notified as forest land, we are refused permission to start projects."

Accordingly a Gujarat State Fertiliser Corporation's plant at Sikka faces problems because a tiny portion of the proposed site falls in an area where a national marine park is supposed to come up. Months back, Gujarat's Environment Department wrote to the Centre asking it to de-notify this land, and the Centre has yet to take a decision.

Sometimes, the Government fixes an environmental norm and then goes and changes it. A classic example: Aravali Fertilisers. First, a government committee picked a site for the fertiliser plant at Sawai Madhopur in Rajasthan. The location was 22 km from a tiger sanctuary.

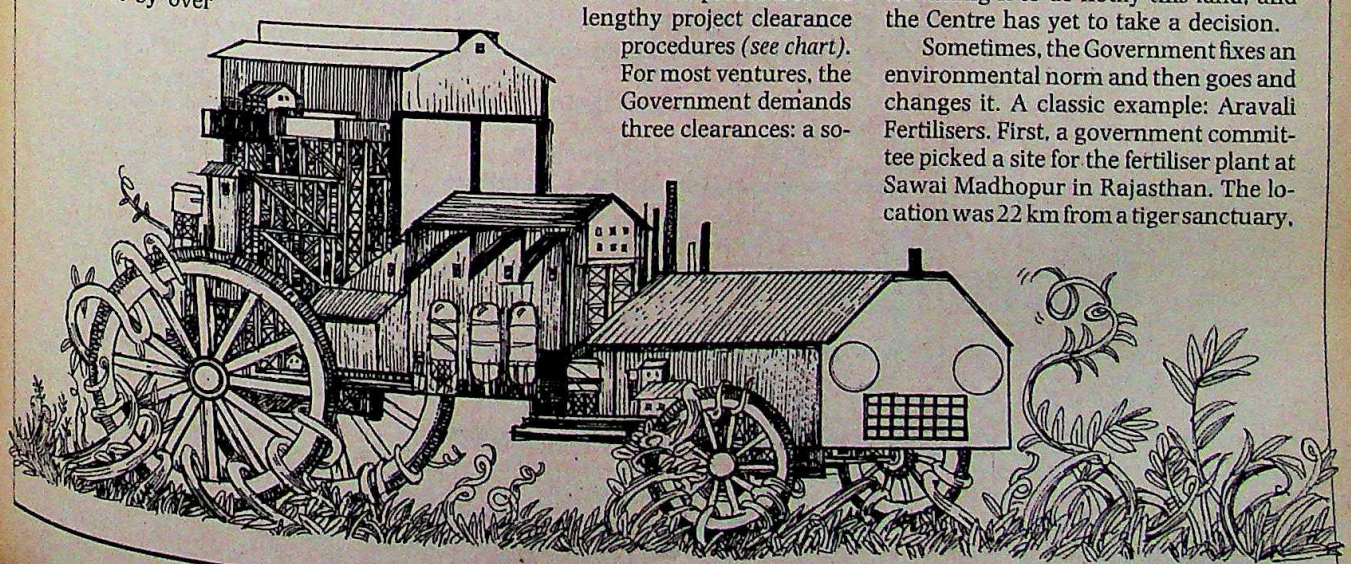

Illustration by MANJULA PADMANABHAN

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B.K. SHARMA

Major Power Projects Held Up

	WHEN REFERRED TO STATE POLLUTION BOARDS / ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY
200 MW Chalkudi Hydro Electric Project, Kerala	MAR 1983
600 MW Sawalkot Hydro Electric Project, J & K	JUNE 1984
630 MW Bakreswar Thermal Power Station, West Bengal	JUNE 1984
2,000 MW Bandhav Thermal Power Plant, M.P.	AUG 1984
420 MW Chittorgarh Thermal Power Station, Rajasthan	NOV 1984
450 MW Baglihar Hydro Electric Project, J & K	FEB 1985
420 MW Tenughat Thermal Power Station, Bihar	NOV 1986
500 MW Dahanu Thermal Power Station, Maharashtra	JUNE 1987

Pending as on June 30, '88

and so well within the then prevailing 15 km norm. The Government then changed its guideline to 30 km. So the location had to be shifted again. A committee comprising officials of the Rajasthan Government and the Environment Ministry picked a new site—5 km from a proposed sanctuary for the Great Indian bustard. Its decision on the location was not quite unanimous. Still, the site was cleared. Reason? The state Government wanted the project through. If the bird sanctuary proposal gets the green signal, the fertiliser project could be caught in a fresh controversy. "The delay is not our fault but the fault of the change in rules," points out H.S. Bawa, Aravali's vice-chairman.

BUT the Government says that companies have only themselves to blame for the long delays in getting official approval for projects. Says a senior Environment Ministry official: "They think it is a joke. They start collecting data after they receive all other government clearances, and the data are often incomplete. How can we clear projects on the basis of inadequate data?" Environmentalist Anil Agarwal endorses this: "Only in recent years has the ministry started asking for data. Most public sector companies have never bothered to collect such data before, in spite of all their lip service to nature. In this situation, delays are inevitable. The delay is not because of the ministry but because of the attitude of companies."

Not all the blame can be laid at the Environment Ministry's door. The Madhya Pradesh State Electricity Board proposed to put up a 420-MW thermal plant over four years ago. The ministry then asked it to furnish details about the number of villages and people who would be affected by acquiring land for the plant, and to come up with a plan to rehabilitate them. If the ministry is to be believed, the board has not yet come back to it with all the information required.

Meanwhile, the entire issue has acquired another dimension. The ministry's technical experts and its bureaucrats are at loggerheads on whether ventures should be held up or not. The scientists want to adhere to the rules, and privately charge the bureaucrats with caving in to political pressure, overruling their decisions and ignoring the ministry's technical guidelines. Matters came to a head recently, and the scientists formed an association to protect their interests. Said a scientist: "After all, you should be clear on whether you are really interested in the environment."

But developmental considerations seem to have weighed with the bureaucrats. As a result, a number of projects have been cleared, with conditions tagged on to the clearance. For example, last August the Government cleared a Rs 170-crore Andhra Pradesh-based project of the Cement Corporation of India (CCI) on condition that the public sector undertaking install pollution control equipment at an older factory in the same place. Says A.U. Rijshinghani, CCI's technical director: "We have always been conscious of the environment. So we will put up another electric precipitator at the old plant."

The question here is: will these companies stick to their promises? As Agarwal argues: "Once you've given clearances and companies have sunk money into projects, it isn't possible to demand that the project be stopped. The workers will protest. So a project has to be stopped at the preliminary stage." Surprisingly, one public sector head agrees. Oil and Natural Gas Commission Chairman S.P. Wahi says: "The moment the Environment Ministry gives clearance, these fellows will forget about their promise."

Still, it is not entirely fair to ask companies, especially losing concerns, to bear what is often a heavy burden. A pollution control board has asked the losing Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation to install anti-pollution devices at its Namrup plant. Says a corporation official: "We are doing it, but only in stages. It will cost us Rs 60 crore, and a loss making unit can't afford so much money." Adds the managing director of a public sector company: "They ask you to make profits. Then they force you to make massive investments in pollution control. How can one afford it?" The ministry's reply: companies can recycle waste using, say, the sulphur from fertiliser plants to make sulphuric acid.

As the debate rages, no clear answers to these disturbing questions emerge. The saving grace: stung by the criticism, the Environment Ministry is revamping procedures and has set a three-month deadline to clear projects. Whether that's cause for corporate whoopee is to be seen.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA
with bureau reports

THE LONG ROAD TO CLEARANCES

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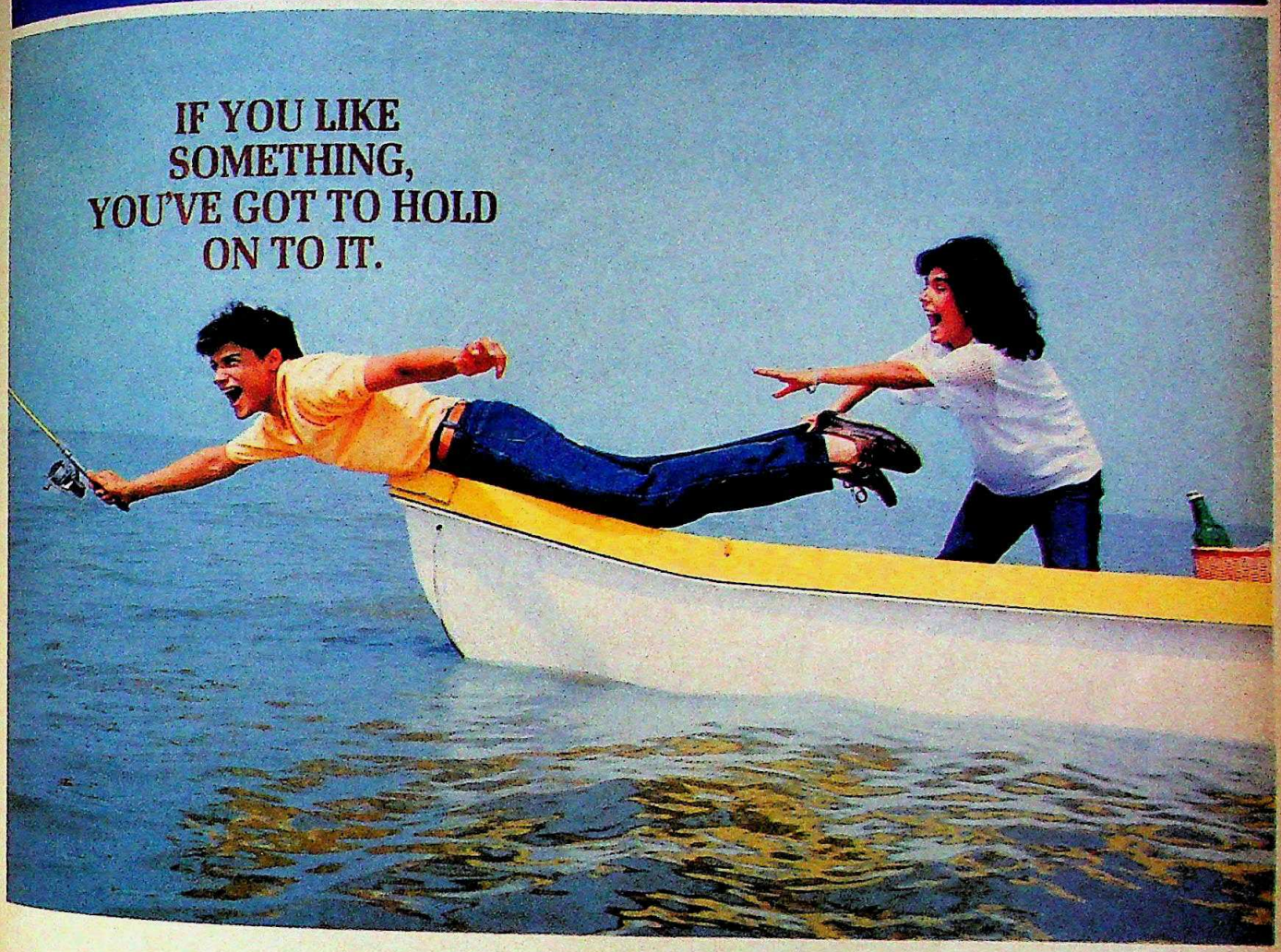

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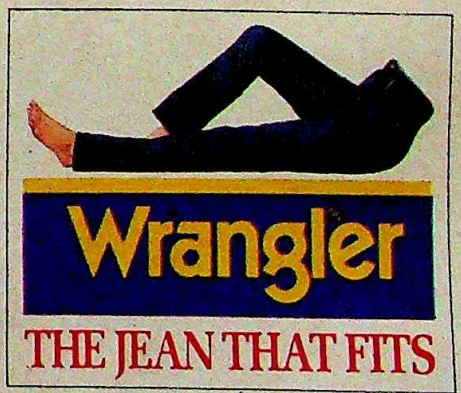

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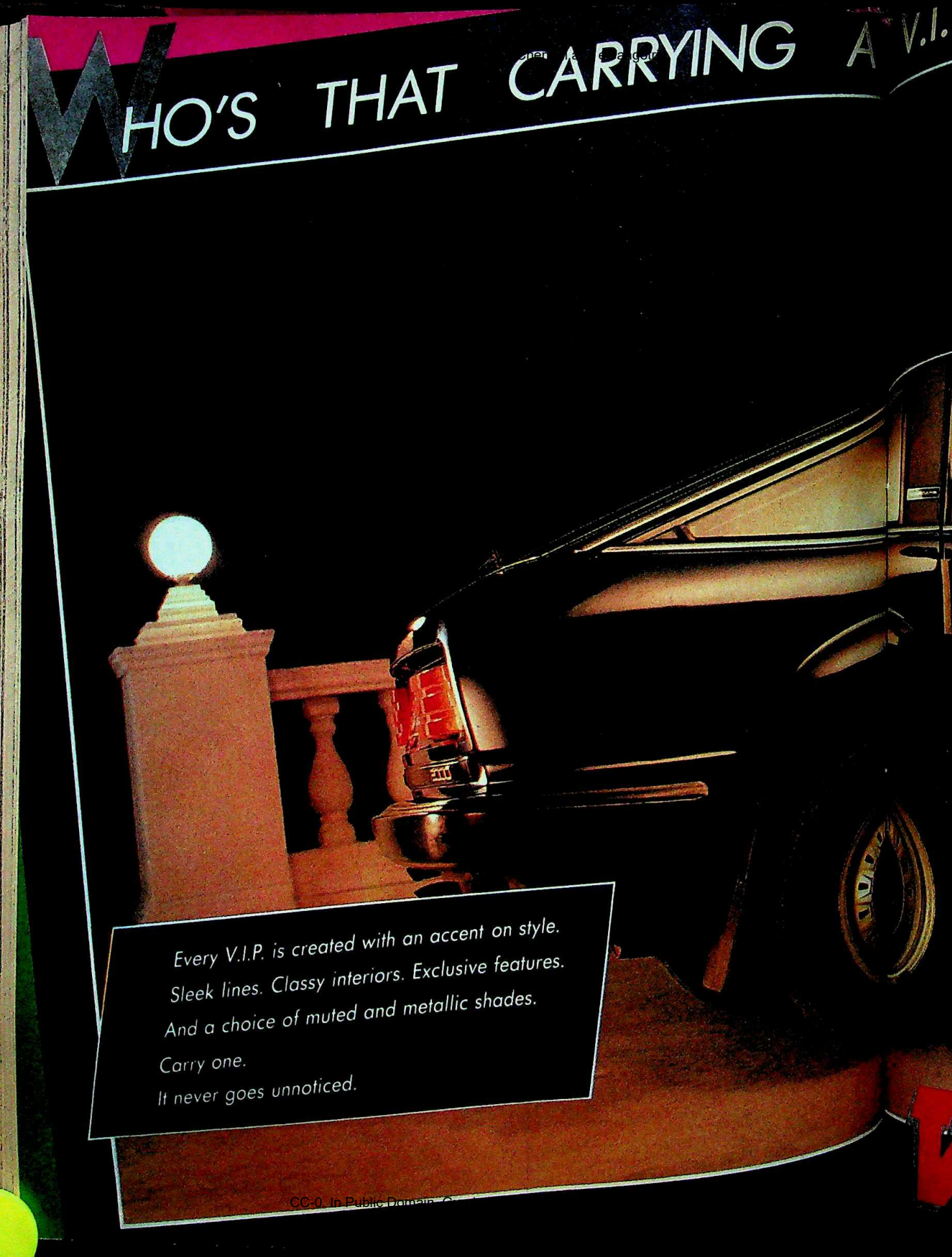

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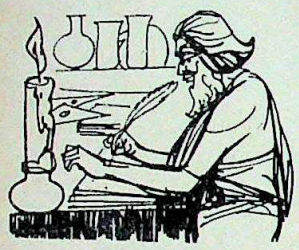
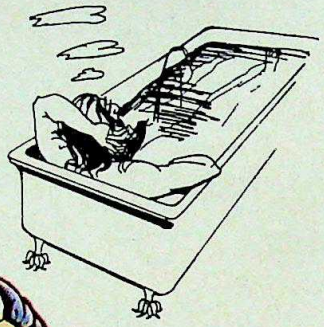


No wrong numbers. No trace of water seepage.



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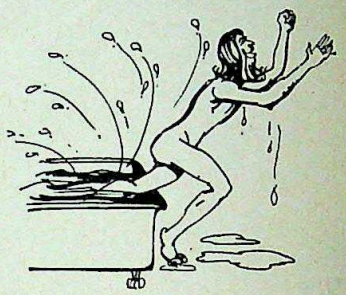

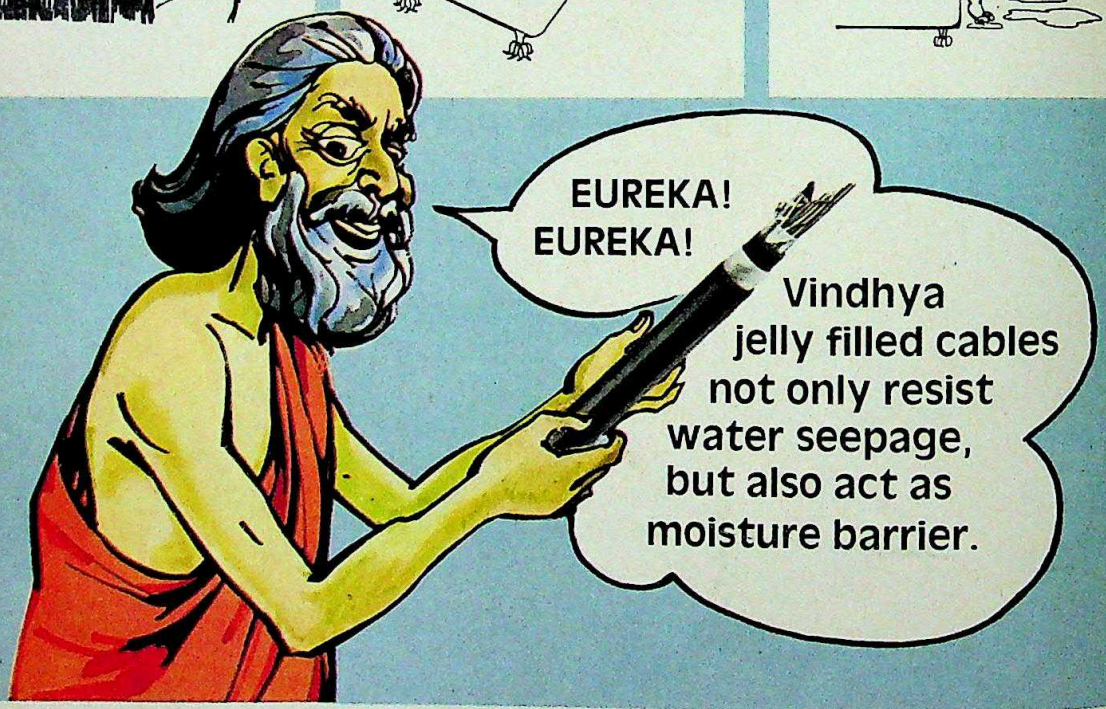

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THE MODIS

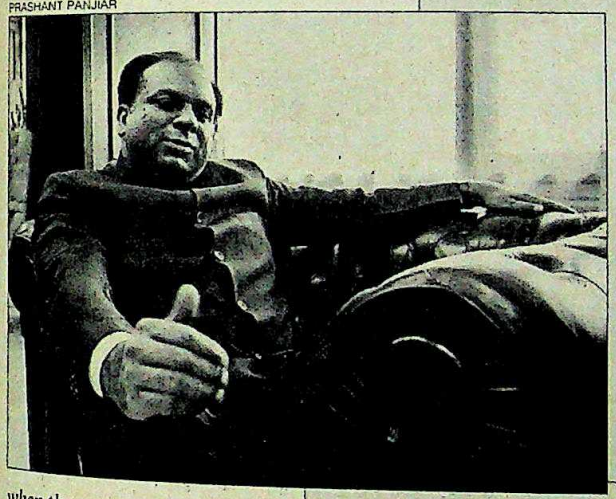
The Fissures Widen

The family feud threatens to spill over into Modi Xerox

August 19, 1988: Bhupendra Kumar Modi, senior vice-chairman and president of Modi Xerox, writes to B.D. Shah, general manager, General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC). Modi's letter was in response to a GIC proposal to appoint R.K. Mahajan as its nominee on the Modi Xerox board of directors. The letter mildly pointed out that the company's foreign collaborator, Rank Xerox of the UK, had objected to the financial institutions being represented on the board when the company was negotiating loans from the institutions, and that the company's articles of association permitted a "maximum limit of 15 directors at any point of time". Modi promised to take up the matter with Rank Xerox.

October 13: three nominees of the state-owned financial institutions write a sharply-worded letter to Modi Xerox and to B.K. Modi. The letter, jointly written by V. Ramachandran, the Industrial Finance Corporation of India's (IFCI) nominee to the board, Sudarshan Lal, nominee of the Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) and R.K. Mahajan, nominee of GIC, questioned the draft of the minutes of a board meeting of Modi Xerox held on September 30. The letter stated: "We are surprised to note that in respect of certain items, the minutes do not reflect the true version of what transpired and (sic) decided at the meeting".

PRASHANT PANJIAR



B.K. Modi complained that K.N. Modi, though only the non-executive head, had begun to play a more active role in the company.

A resolution to oust K.N. Modi as chairman came up at the company's September 30 board meeting. But the move was buried.

THESE are by no means the only letters. In recent months, the financial institutions have been writing to Rank Xerox in the UK, so much so that one of its representative said in jest last fortnight: "I wish we got so many letters from a pretty girl." Modi Xerox Chairman K.N. Modi has been writing letters too. And, of course, the institutions and B.K. Modi have been exchanging letters. Certainly, writing letters on business matters is normal practice—as nearly everyone involved in this verbiage is quick to insist.

But the flurry of letters is far from routine. The acrimonious feud between the two factions of the Modi family—group chairman K.N. Modi and his three sons, and the five sons of the late Gujar Mal Modi (K.N. Modi's brother)—is threatening to spill over into the Rs 81-crore Modi Xerox. Indeed, a resolution to remove company Chairman K.N. Modi from his post came up at a board meeting on September 30. K.N. Modi stayed away from the meeting (he says he was ill), and the move was buried.

But the hatchets have not been buried. Instead of a settlement at the Rs 1,100-crore group, the fissures between the two sides seem unbridgeable. What's more, action is hotting up on the institutional front. Among other things, they've protested about the September 30 Modi Xerox board meeting.

Caught in the middle of these developments is Rank Xerox. At the September 30 meeting, the Rank Xerox executive director circulated a note which maintained that the board's chairman had no right to vet the agenda, that his prior approval wasn't needed to call a meeting, and that obtaining prior approval would prejudice the right of Rank Xerox directors to call a meeting.

But Rank Xerox officials are quick to clarify that their company isn't involved in the Modi family dispute. Understandably, Xerox does not want problems with its Indian associate. In just three years, the high-profile Modi company has snared a 40 per cent share of the Indian copier market. Income has shot up from Rs 6.5 crore to Rs 81.09 crore, profits are up (*see chart*), and past losses have been wiped out.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Nevertheless, the family dispute can not be wished away. At one point, B.K. Modi (who's one of Gujar Mal Modi's sons) complained that K.N. Modi had begun to play a more active role in Modi Xerox, and that he'd no right to do this as he was the company's non-executive head.

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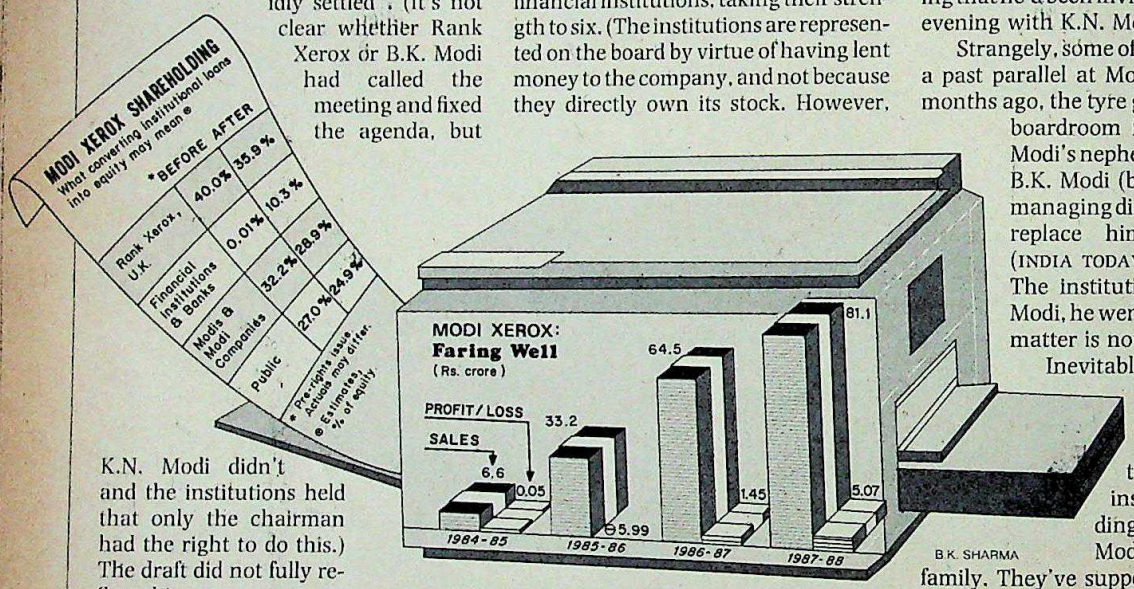
In fact, the first item on the agenda of the September 30 board meeting was the replacement of K.N. Modi as chairman.

The October 13 letter by the three financial institutional men tells the story more fully. In it, they dispute the photocopier company's draft of the minutes on several counts. Among them:

► Lal and Mahajan were not present at the meeting as "invitees" but "by virtue of their being directors nominated by ICICI and GIC".

► The institutions attended the meeting under protest because, they argued, it was not "validly convened and the agenda has not been validly settled". (It's not clear whether Rank Xerox or B.K. Modi had called the meeting and fixed the agenda, but K.N. Modi didn't and the institutions held that only the chairman had the right to do this.) The draft did not fully reflect this.



► B.K. Modi, who presided over the meeting, moved that the item on replacing K.N. Modi as chairman be dropped. It was, but the draft said that its consideration had been deferred.

B.K. Modi, however, explains he'd not seen the minutes of the meeting. "I'd not seen the minutes. The company secretary looks after these matters. There are always these questions. There was nothing of substance," he insists, adding: "Nothing has happened at Modi Xerox. There's no controversy." But he did claim that K.N. Modi "started acting as executive chairman" and gave directions to Modi Xerox personnel—a charge K.N. Modi dismissed, saying merely: "I was chairman and acted as chairman." Added one of his sons: "K.N. Modi has run companies before you and I were born. In some companies he's been the managing director, in others the chairman of the board. I'm sure he knows the distinction between the two."

According to B.K. Modi, the institutions merely objected to K.N. Modi not having been informed when the September 30 board meeting was called. That's probably true, but there were other subsidiary issues. Apart from voicing opinions at the meeting about who could convene the meeting and who could not, the institutions have been exercising their rights—if not flexing their muscles—at the photocopier company. Last fortnight, the company's articles of association were amended at a shareholders meeting to raise the strength of the 15-member board to 18. The board then met and inducted three more nominees of the financial institutions, taking their strength to six. (The institutions are represented on the board by virtue of having lent money to the company, and not because they directly own its stock. However, Modi Rubber has a substantial stake in Modi Xerox, and the institutions hold 51 per cent of Modi Rubber's equity.)

To be sure, the institutions have put more nominees on the boards of all Modi companies in which they have a financial stake. Still, they also seem to have served notice that they would exercise their right to convert some 20 per cent of their loans into equity.

That will alter the shareholding pattern at Modi Xerox. Rank Xerox's 40 per cent stake in the company will drop (*see chart*) after the institutions exercise their conversion right. According to one version of what transpired at last fortnight's board meeting, Rank Xerox officials argued that their concern's equity stake should be maintained at 40 per cent, but the institutions remained unconvinced. Asked about this, K.N. Modi replied: "I can't tell you what happened at the meeting." But he confirmed that "the shares of the financial institutions were approved". The same day, Rank Xerox Executive Director David Thompson, who was in New Delhi for the board meeting, met IFCI Chairman D.N. Davar.

What the two discussed is not clear. Said Thompson: "It was all very routine." Asked about his note to the board on September 30, he said: "It's not the first letter I've written to the board and I'm sure it won't be the last. It was just a statement of our position with respect to the role of certain people. It's a tiny mouse which is being turned into an elephant. That's how we see it." Thompson also stressed that Rank Xerox was on good terms with both Modi factions, adding that he'd been invited for a drink that evening with K.N. Modi and his sons.

Strangely, some of these events have a past parallel at Modi Rubber. Three months ago, the tyre giant saw a messy boardroom fracas, with K.N. Modi's nephews K.K. Modi and B.K. Modi (both Modi Rubber managing directors) moving to replace him as chairman (INDIA TODAY, September 15). The institutions backed K.N. Modi, he went to court, and the matter is now being heard.

Inevitably, events at Modi Xerox have raised the question of whether the financial institutions were siding with the K.N. Modi branch of the family. They've supported the influential K.N. Modi at Modi Rubber, and now back him again at Modi Xerox. While one institution's head obliquely suggested that a colleague at another institution was indeed sympathetic to K.N. Modi, an official at yet another institution declared this wasn't true: "The stand of the institutions is that the working of Modi companies should not be affected by family conflicts."

Oddly, if there's one area of agreement between B.K. Modi and his cousins, it's that the institutions are operating independently. In nearly everything else, disagreements persist, including on whether talks between the two sides have been resumed through intermediaries (B.K. Modi says that they have, K.N. Modi's sons maintain that this is not the case). The only thing clear last fortnight was that the saga of the Modi family feud is rapidly deteriorating into a soap opera to which no end seems to be in sight. —PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI and SURAJEET DAS GUPTA

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The mission has been renewed in the third generation. A bolder step has been taken to rejuvenate the public sector steel industry by modernising the four integrated steel plants at Durgapur, Rourkela, Burnpur and Bokaro and setting up a giant steel plant at Vizag for a faster economic growth.

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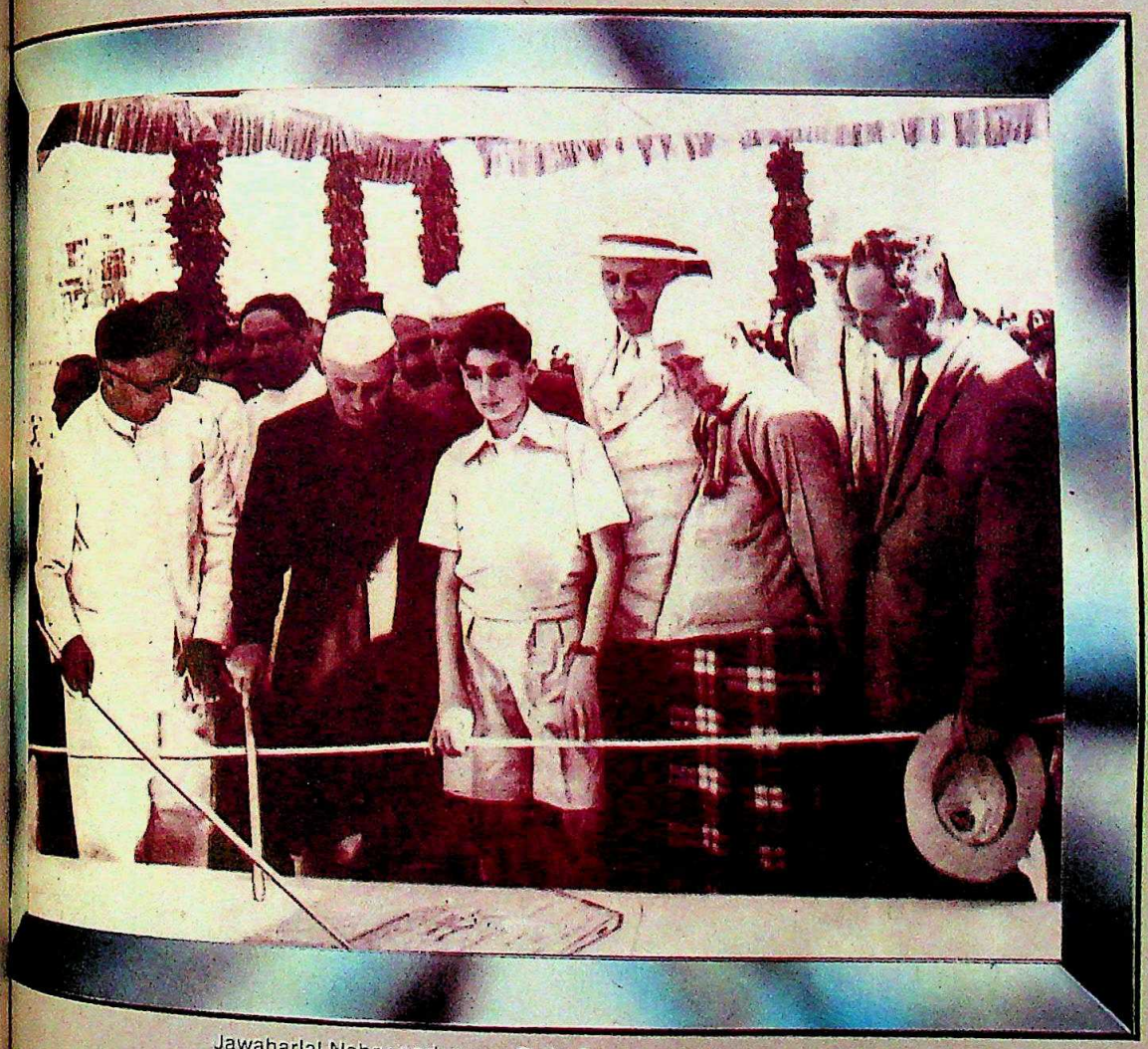

Jawaharlal Nehru and young Rajiv Gandhi at Bhilai — seeing the shape of things to come

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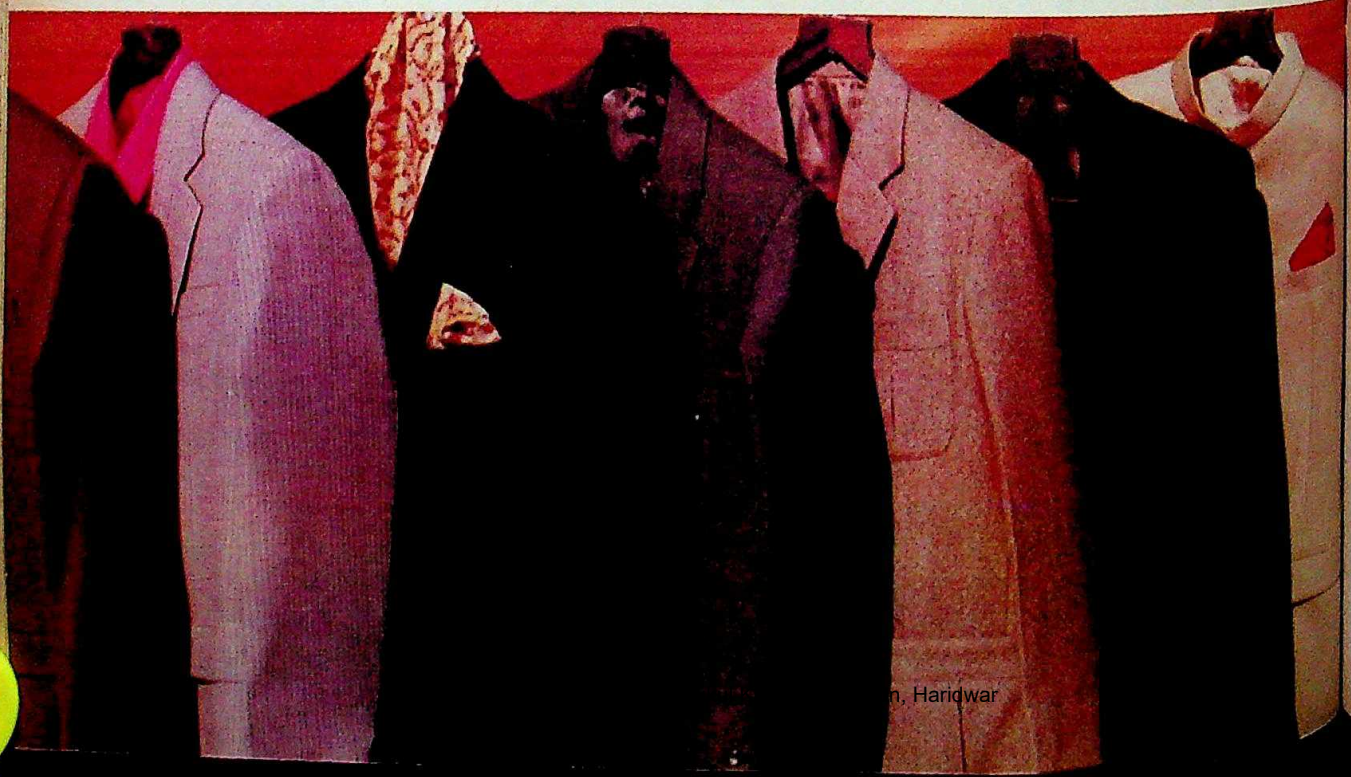

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GARMENTS

The Big Rush

Large companies enter fray

SUDDENLY, ready-made garments are the hottest item in town. Virtually every name in the big business pantheon—from the Wadias and the Ambanis to the Mafatlals, the Birlas and the Singhanias—has either made a foray into the domestic clothing market or will do so. Lured by business prospects in a market that, some say, doubles itself every four years, several textile giants and even a shoe company are leaping into what was once a small business preserve.

Look at the list of entrants. Over six months ago, Praful Shah's Garden Silk Mills launched shirts and women's apparel in Maharashtra and Gujarat, and will go national with them by 1989-end. Nusli Wadia's Bombay Dyeing is test marketing shirts in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. These will also go national early next year. Last month, Aditya Birla's Grasim Industries launched some upmarket shirts and trousers, and will eventually put women's dresses into shops around the country. Several months ago, Vijaypat Singhania's Raymond Woollen Mills unveiled shirts and trousers. In three or four months, Mafatlal Industries will introduce upmarket shirts in its 200 retail outlets. Not to be outdone, Reliance Industries will peddle both men's and women's wear in six months. And S.K. Birla's VXL India plans to turn out ready-to-wear woollen suits.

Even Bata has entered the business. Two months ago, it introduced shirts under the Ambassador label in the four metropolitan cities (this is part of a bigger plan to franchise a chain of stores that will peddle an array of Ambassador wares). "We hope to sell shirts worth Rs 18 crore by 1989," says Vinod Kaul, Bata's manager for apparels. Last month, the shoe manufacturer followed this up with a separate range of casual wear (denim jeans, jackets, shirts, skirts, all made by the Delhi-based Inmark Ltd, a Mohan Murjani company). Future plans include many more Murjani products: Gloria Vanderbilt jeans and exclusive Tommy Hilfiger shirts, to be sold by separate, Tommy Hilfiger stores.

There are numerous reasons for this rush. For textile firms, ready-mades are a logical extension of business. Indeed, they probably have little choice. Mills hawk fabric to hundreds of small garment makers. But many mills simply cannot compete with low-priced power-loom fabrics. As a result, many small garment firms are buying more cloth from power-looms and the trend will accelerate. Admits S.B. Agarwal, textiles adviser to Grasim Industries: "We cannot sell at the powerloom rate. In the next three years, powerlooms will take over the garment industry."

New garments in the market: big business

So making the best of a bad bargain, the big boys are cashing in on their brand names and distribution channels. Says a Reliance spokesman: "We can put our shirts into 1,500 franchise stores." Best of all, project costs are low. The Garden Silk Mills project costs just Rs 1 crore. Reliance will be spending under Rs 4 crore for its Ahmedabad-based venture. The reason is no one is putting up a manufacturing plant at the moment—they're merely marketing garments made to specification by small manufacturers.

Still, there's little doubt that industry heavies want to get in on the ground floor of a business that's poised to explode. Argues Mafatlal Industries Director Hrishikesh Mafatlal: "Our feeling is that the market's limited. But whoever's first in will reap the harvest 10 years later." And at least Bata believes that ready-mades offer better prospects than shoes. Says Ashok Mathur, Bata's general manager for marketing: "The ready-made business is growing by 20 to 25 per cent per annum whereas shoe sales are growing only by 6 or 7 per cent."

Figures in the garment business are rough and ready; but a recent study commissioned by Grasim Industries reported annual shirt sales of Rs 25 crore in Delhi and Bombay alone, with trouser sales accounting for another Rs 14 crore. Total domestic garment sale are bound to be big. Says Vandana Shah of Garden Silk Mills: "The total market (organised and unorganised sectors) probably exceeds Rs 500 crore." So far, customer response has been buoying. Bombay Dyeing's Vice-President for Marketing Rutton Batlivala says: "In four months, we sold about 70,000 shirts. The response has surpassed our expectations." Chips in Bata's Kaul: "The response has been explosive."

That's bad news for medium and small garment manufacturers. But Anees Noorani, whose Bombay-based Zodiac group of companies recently launched Van Husen and other shirts, says he's not concerned. "I'm not worried. The big companies will stir up demand with their publicity," says he. "But they don't realise that clothing is a very personalised business."

Companies like Bombay Dyeing have been unsuccessful in the clothing business in the past. And the new garments—with a few exceptions—are overpriced. "There is a market—if the price is right," says Mafatlal. "That's a big if." Sure, things are iffy. But competition could pare prices. If that happens, the big daddies will have ushered in a clothing revolution.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI

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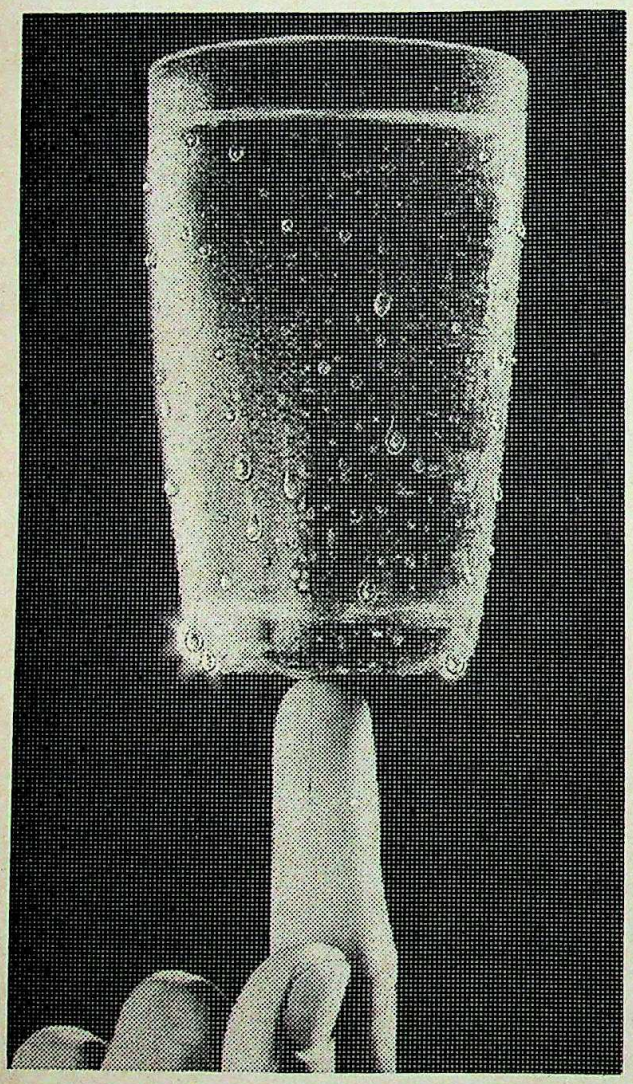

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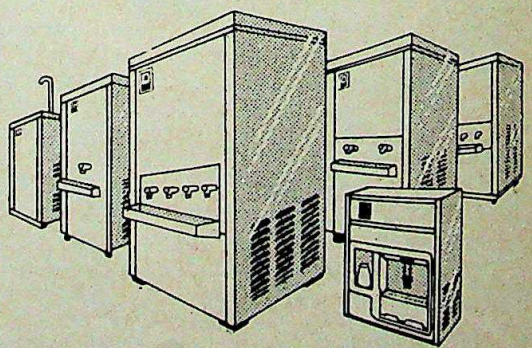

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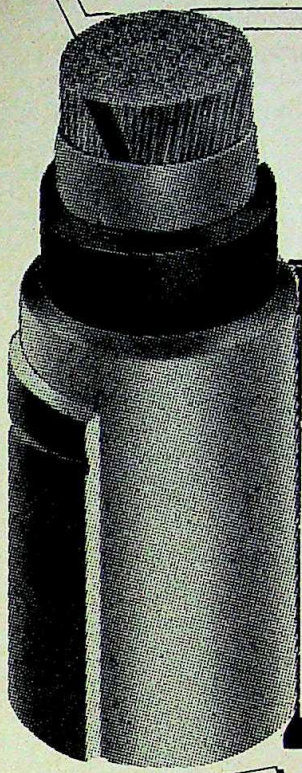
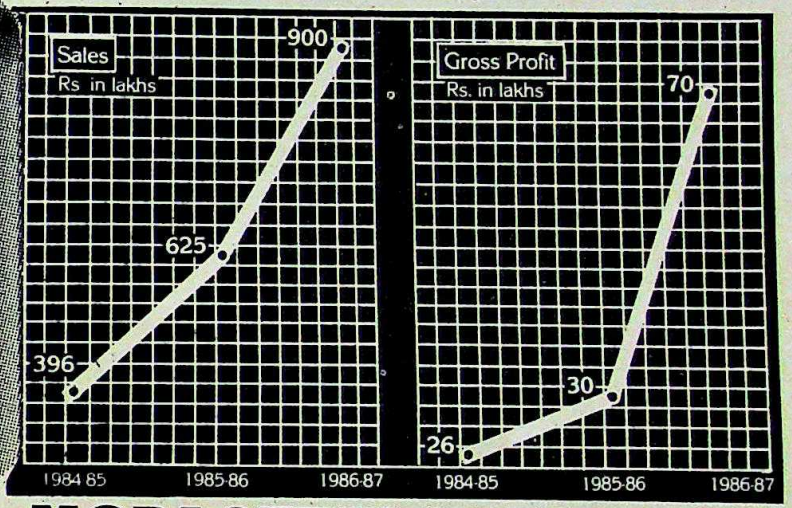
A Company is measured by the growth it achieves.



The Growth Story



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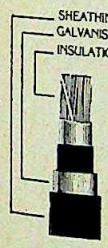

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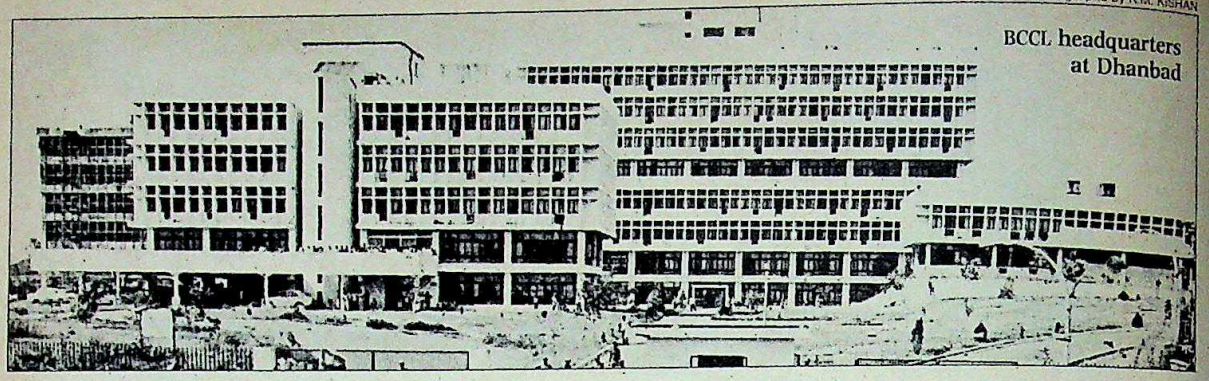
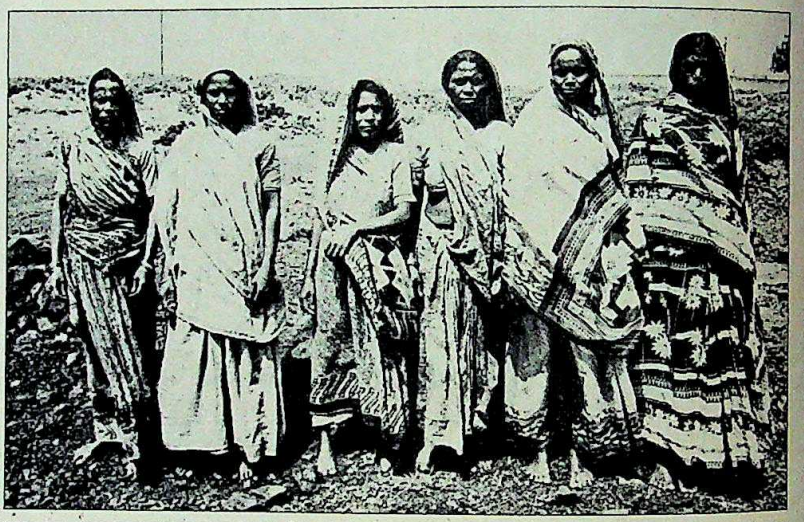


BCCL headquarters at Dhanbad

BCCL

A Sham Job

Racket in fake employees



Under the guise of a voluntary retirement scheme, about 10,000 women have been muscled out of their jobs and their "sons-in-law" appointed in their place.

CRIME and vice have for long flourished in Bihar's infamous coal belt. But now the mafia dons who control the area in the garb of politicians or trade union leaders have launched a new racket at the Rs 722-crore Bharat Coking Coal Ltd (BCCL), the heavily losing Coal India Limited subsidiary that runs the Dhanbad and Jharia coalfields. The state-owned company has on its rolls hundreds of employees who either draw a salary from BCCL but do not work there, or are impostors who have forcibly replaced genuine workers and get paid under their name.

Samir Lach holds a job at BCCL. But he spends his day working as the manager of a hotel run by a relative of Suryadeo Singh, Janata MLA, trade union leader, and mafia don who is currently under judicial custody. Juman Mian, also an employee of the company where he is known as Rahim Mian, has been Suryadeo Singh's driver for over a decade.

These are a few of the more prominent cases. District officials believe the total number of fake employees at BCCL could run into thousands. The racket was probably set in motion after the coal mines were nationalised in 1971. However, official recognition of its existence and action to stop it began only in 1986, mainly because of the determination of Dhanbad Deputy Commissioner Madan Mohan Jha who actively pursued a couple of cases that came to his notice.

The first case was Moti Chand Teli's, 35, a casual labourer at Burragarh colliery since 1971. In 1975, when the mines were flooded, he was asked to return home and assured that when the mines resumed operations he would be recalled. On his return, several months later, he was told his papers were still with headquarters. Years of dealing with the bureaucracy had inured him to such delays. But when Moti Chand heard that a local mafia chief had taken the register of casual workers, he began making inquiries. Six years later he heard that an impostor named Hukum Chandra Yadav was working in his name. He appealed to the higher bureaucracy and in 1985, Jha registered a case. Yadav was arrested twice but re-employed by the company. Finally, last year, 13 years after his ordeal began, Moti Chand got his job back.

Another case was Gopal Nandi's. While being on the rolls of BCCL as a casual labourer, he worked as a cook in the house of a trade union leader, Deep Narain Singh, where he was virtually held as a bonded labourer. His daily wage of Rs 50 would be collected by Singh and he himself received a paltry sum of Rs 300. When Nandi mustered the courage to ask for his full salary, he was beaten up. Following a tip-off, the Jharia police rescued him.

Jha soon realised that these were not isolated instances. He learnt that cases had been registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation but the investigations made no headway. It was also evident that the coalfield mafia could not have managed to make such a success of the racket without the connivance of BCCL and district officials. By August this year, the police registered 29 cases of fake appointments. Involved in the racket were mafia leaders of varying political affiliations, BCCL officials and a few low-level government officials.

But the real crackdown came in September this year, when the adminis-

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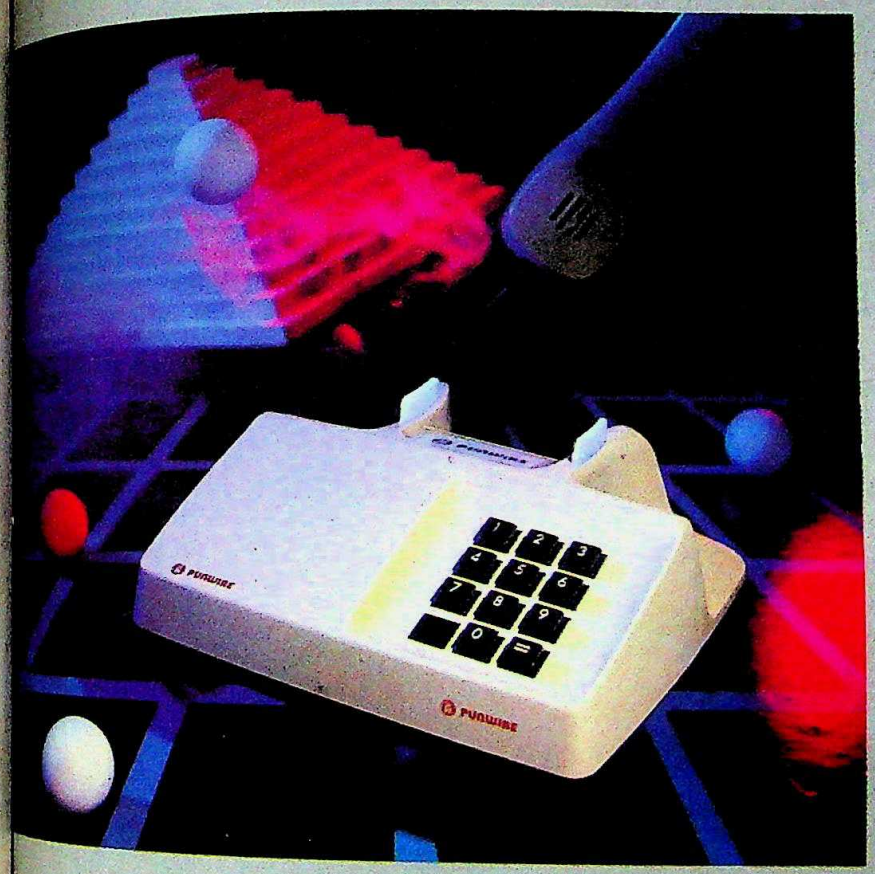

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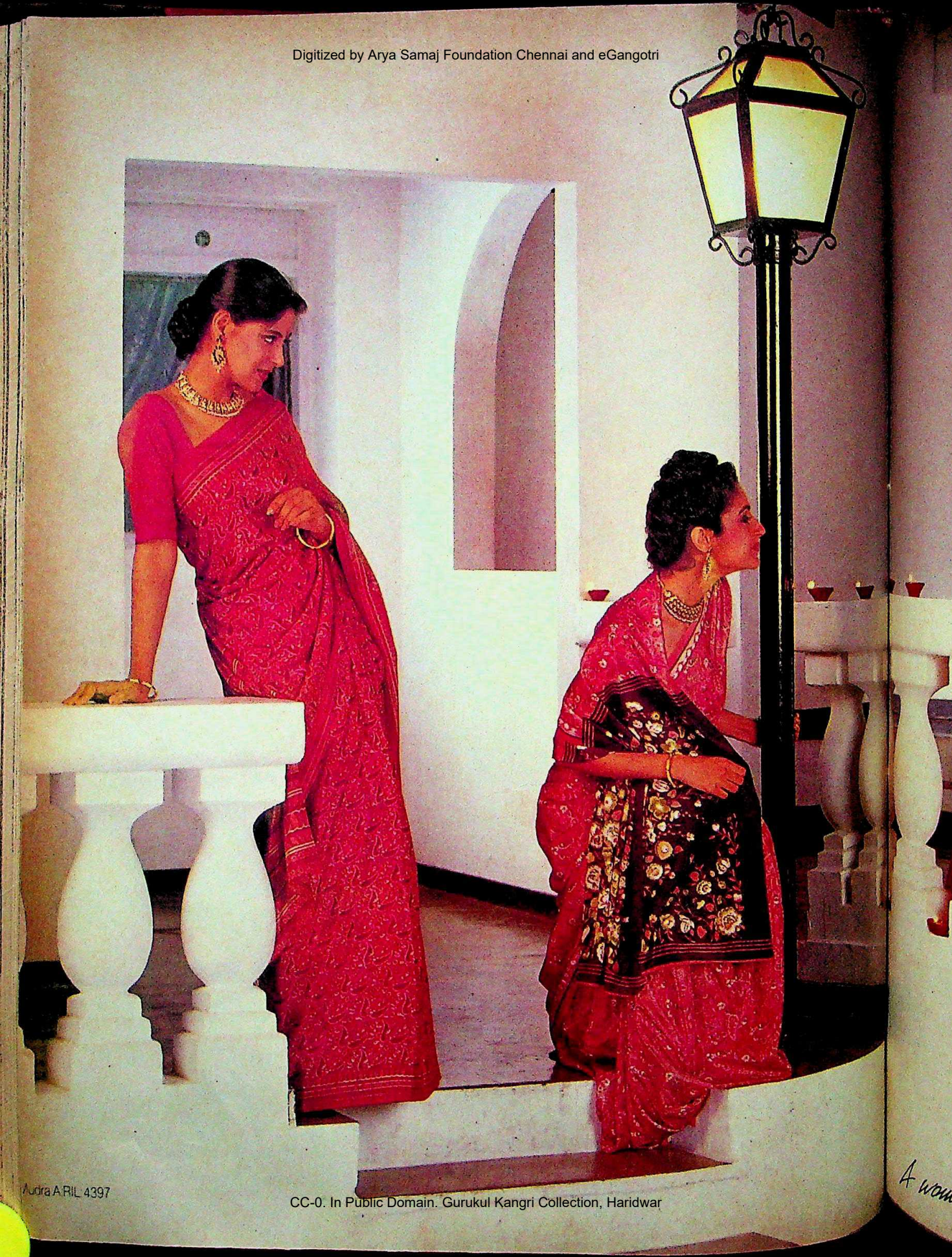

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A woman expresses herself in many languages. Vimal is one of them. VIMAL A RELIANCE PRODUCT Sarees

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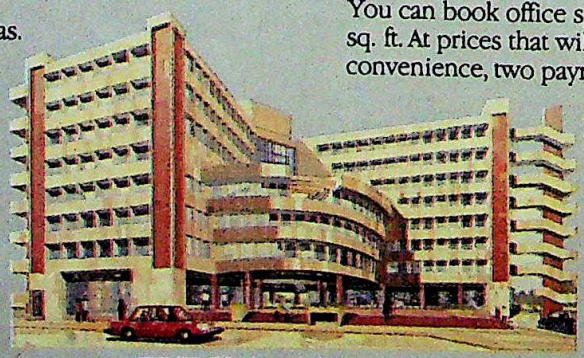

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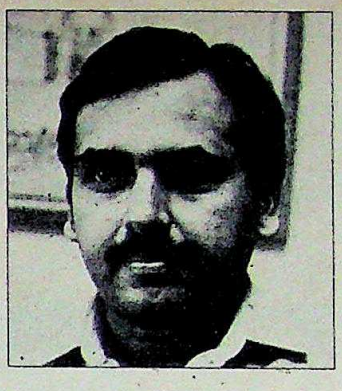
tration arrested three senior company officers, including Deputy Chief Personnel Manager N.L. Singh—who also happens to be the president of the BCCL branch of the Coal Mines Officers' Association of India (CMOAI). Company officials responded by going on a week-long strike that cost Rs 10 crore by way of lost production. In the prolonged mud-slinging that followed, the CMOAI termed the arrests "an abuse of power by the administration" while the authorities felt the strike was an attempt to blackmail them and protect the mafia.

The CMOAI claims that the cases registered against company officials are fabricated. For instance, N.L. Singh was arrested on the charge of issuing appointment letters to five impostors in 1983. CMOAI leaders argue that the appointment letters were issued only after the candidates were identified by government officials, like block development officers and even superintendents of police, but no action was taken against them. Moreover, when in June this year BCCL discovered that the appointees were impostors, they were removed from service. Association members say the matter should have ended there and believe that the arrests were made later only to discredit them. They have sent a memorandum to the Central Government arguing their case.



Suryadeo Singh (top left); Jha; and CMOAI leaders: crossing swords

THE thrust of the investigation, however, was not directed at BCCL officials but at Suryadeo Singh. District officials now claim to have detected 21 impostors who were working for the mafia strongman but drawing salaries from the company. Predictably, Suryadeo Singh says that "the administration is trying to malign me". His only error, he claims, was believing people when they came to him for identification. But he gives himself away when he says that other trade union leaders have got more impostors appointed than he has. He warns that nearly 50 per cent of the employees might be fakes. In a perfect instance of the pot calling the kettle black, he says that another trade union leader, S.K. Rai, close to former chief minister Bindeshwari Dubey, had got 900 impostors appointed but only nine were replaced. Even official sources concede that several Congress(I) leaders close to Dubey are involved in the racket.

Besides being illegal, the fake appointments are also a manifestation of the deep-rooted caste antagonisms in the region. In nearly every case where a worker has been replaced, he belongs to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe and the impostor to a higher caste. A look at the statistics reveals the rapidity with which Harijans and tribals are being edged out of BCCL. In January 1979, there were 42,083 class IV employees (miners, loaders, etc). Of them, 16,436 or 39.05 per cent belonged to the Scheduled Castes and 5,654 or 13.43 per cent to the Scheduled Tribes. In 1986, the total number of class IV employees had gone up to 50,370 but the number of Harijans had slumped to 15,111 or 30 per cent and that of tribals to 3,844 or 7.82 per cent.

The mafia-higher caste nexus has, in fact, attempted to change the caste composition of BCCL's labour force for many years now. Over a decade ago, the company announced a voluntary scheme under which workers over 45 years of age, particularly women, could retire and instead nominate their dependents. The retirement scheme was ostensibly intended to rejuvenate the workforce. What happened was something quite different, though perhaps not totally unintended or unexpected. An estimated 10,000 women suddenly found themselves jobless and their "sons-in-law" appointed in their place.

Kunti Bhuiyan, 45, was a Harijan loader. In 1976 she discovered—entirely without her knowledge—that she had taken advantage of the voluntary retirement scheme and that her son-in-law had been appointed in her place. As Kunti has no son-in-law she was stunned. "I have three sons and a one-year-old daughter. How in such circumstances can I have a son-in-law?" she says. Another victim of the scheme was Basanti, 40, with a ten-month-old son, two daughters aged eight and four but no son-in-law. Chota Sohagan with three sons and a daughter aged six and Kabutri, a 30-year-old widow, are others who lost jobs and gained sons-in-law in the same manner. Though all the women protested, none of them has been reinstated by the company.

A BCCL spokesman's only explanation is that the task of investigating impostors is long-drawn and complicated. For good measure he adds that "there is no question of non-cooperation," as the company has set up as many as 45 teams to check and update its records. The company's past record, however, does not instil much confidence in such claims.

All the same, the recent crackdown on fake employees has rekindled the hopes of workers who have been muscled out of their jobs. But in the face of opposition from the powerful mafia dons, the administration is likely to find bringing impostors to book a far more difficult task than drilling through the rocky stretches of the state's coal-belt.

—FARZAND AHMAD

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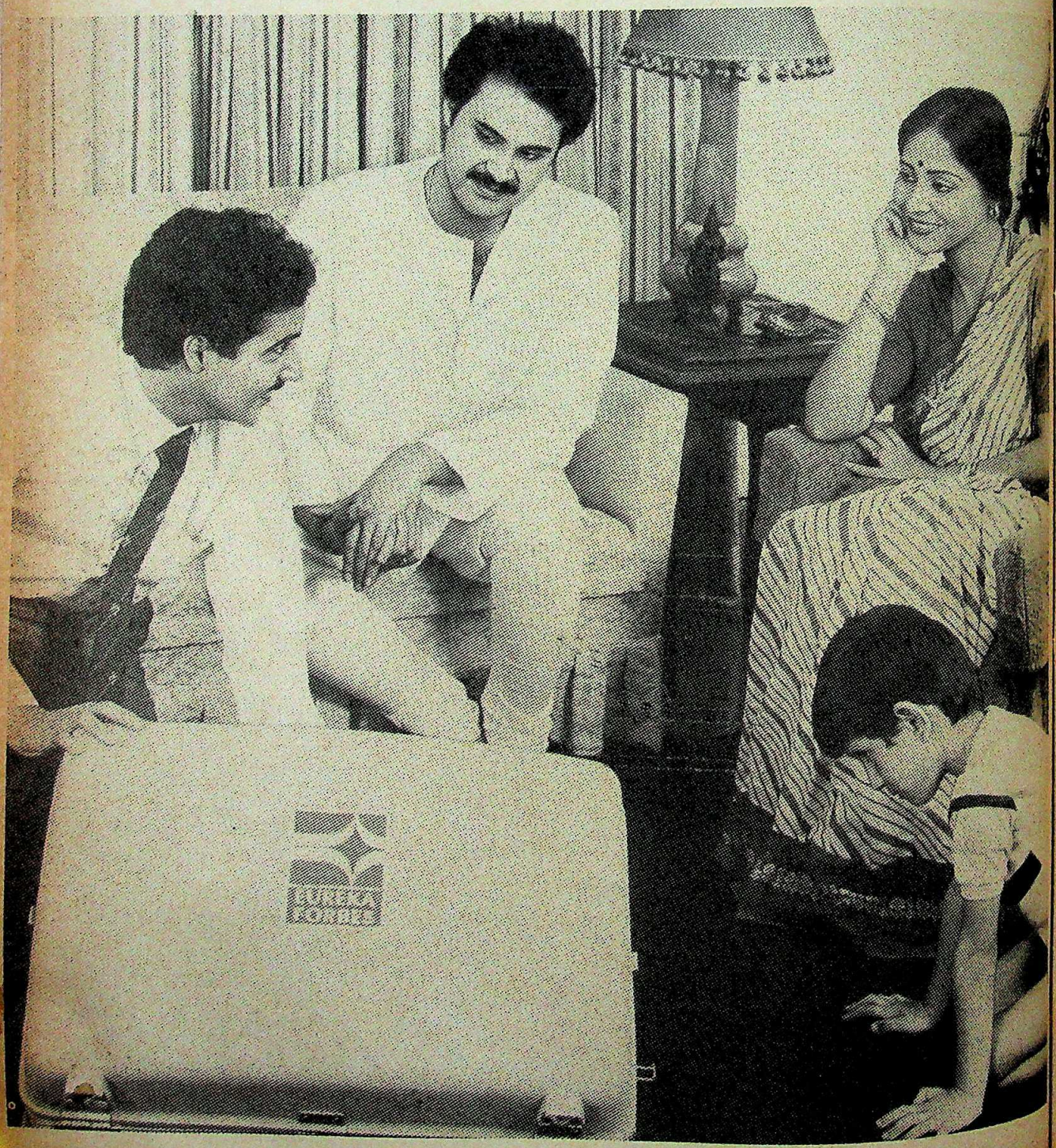

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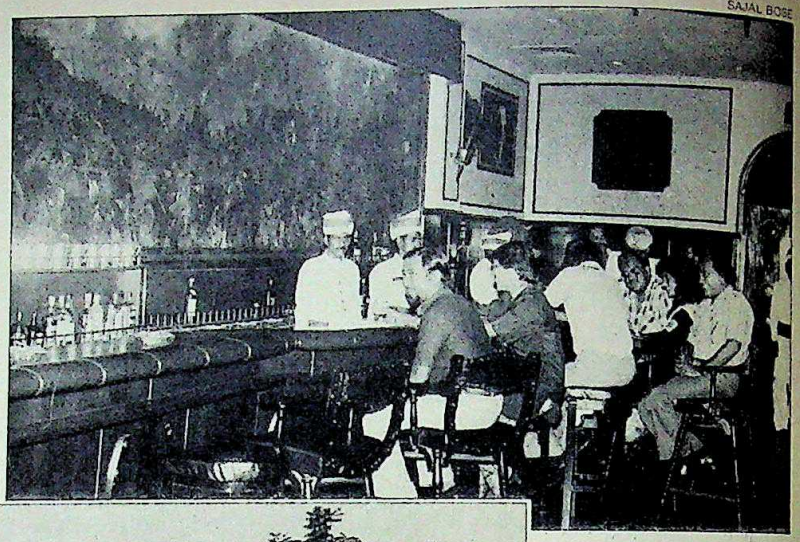
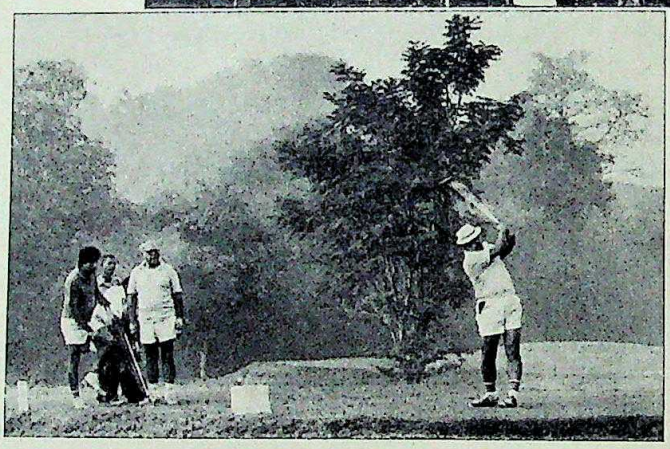
EXECUTIVE LIFESTYLE

Oh Calcutta!

The charming corporate life

SAJAL BOSE





An evening at Saturday Club; and (left) executives playing golf: laid-back

HIS sprawling bungalow in Calcutta's Alipur area is adorned with paintings by contemporary Indian artists. The guest-room has old, Victorian chairs and tables polished to a gloss. Cut to Bobby Majumdar's garden. It's dotted with statues chiselled by the finest sculptors.

His plush home apart, the Tractors India Limited managing director enjoys Calcutta's long-drawn-out winter parties, the obligatory evening drive, the weekly game of golf at Tollygunge Club. And Majumdar proudly displays his collection of 250 pipes, acquired over years of travel.

A couple of kilometres away, Deepak Das Gupta, group staff manager at liquor giant Shaw Wallace, readies himself for an 80-year-old company ritual—the executive lunch. At lunch every working day, senior Shaw Wallace executives gather at an exclusive fourth-floor dining hall where they are served by turbaned bearers dressed in spotless white. The menu has changed very little down the years—soup, cold meat, pudding, and fresh fruits, all served in bone china crockery and cut glass. Silver spoons are *de rigueur*.

Majumdar and Das Gupta represent a common phenomenon in the last bastion of the Raj: company executives whose gracious lifestyles testify to Calcutta's hidden executive perquisites. In a Marxist-dominated city where politicians live simply, company executives are big fishes in a small pond. The pace of work is laid-back—for example, at tea company Goodricke executives aren't encouraged to work beyond their office hours and certainly not on holidays—lunches can go on into the late afternoon, and evenings are often marked by a game of golf, followed by a drink or two at the city's relatively inexpensive clubs.

Senior executives in other cities too share in the good corporate life. But caught in the executive rat race, they wind up paying a heavy price for this. In Calcutta, most executives work in a far less competitive milieu. Notes M. Roy Kapoor, general manager at Coates of India Limited: "In Bombay two executives are pitted against each other and told: Okay, you guys work and the sky is the limit. There is cutthroat competition. In Calcutta, it's different. The boss tells you your goals early and you have to achieve them. You also know that your promotion will come on time, without any hassles." Adds Krishan Dhawan, vice-president at the Bank of America, who recently came to Calcutta after a two-year posting in Bombay: "People here are less commercial or mercantile than in Bombay." A number of executives privately report that, within the same company, the work pressures are often lighter in Calcutta than in the offices at other cities.

A few executives, usually those who are starting their careers, find the atmosphere stultifying and soon seek a transfer to other cities or switch jobs. But the majority passionately swears by Calcutta's old world charm. "The city grows on you," declares Subir Dutta, managing director, Coats of India Limited. "I would hate to leave it." Dutta has coaxed many a reluctant executive from outside to join his Calcutta-based industrial inks company. Adds he: "Most of them come to Calcutta with all sorts of wrong ideas and hate the place for the first few months. But after some years they just don't want to go. The warmth of the city overwhelms them."

ITC Chairman Jagdish N. Sapru is another ardent Calcutta buff. Sapru put in brief stints in Bombay during the course of his long career with the cigarette company and says: "Delhi is a city of government servants and diplomats, Bombay is a haven for businessmen. Calcutta is the only city where executives have a distinct identity they can call their own. It's a great city for executives." It is this sense of identity that demarcates professional life in Calcutta from that in any other city.

To be sure, Calcutta has mountains of civic problems: power cuts and clogged roads, to name just two of them. But company executives live in a world of their own, insulated from the travails of the hoi polloi. Most reside in south Calcutta, in the more affluent Ballygunge and Alipur localities or at Tivoli Court, the multi-storeyed sprawl that's still predominantly an executive preserve. And thanks to generous company managements, most have genera-

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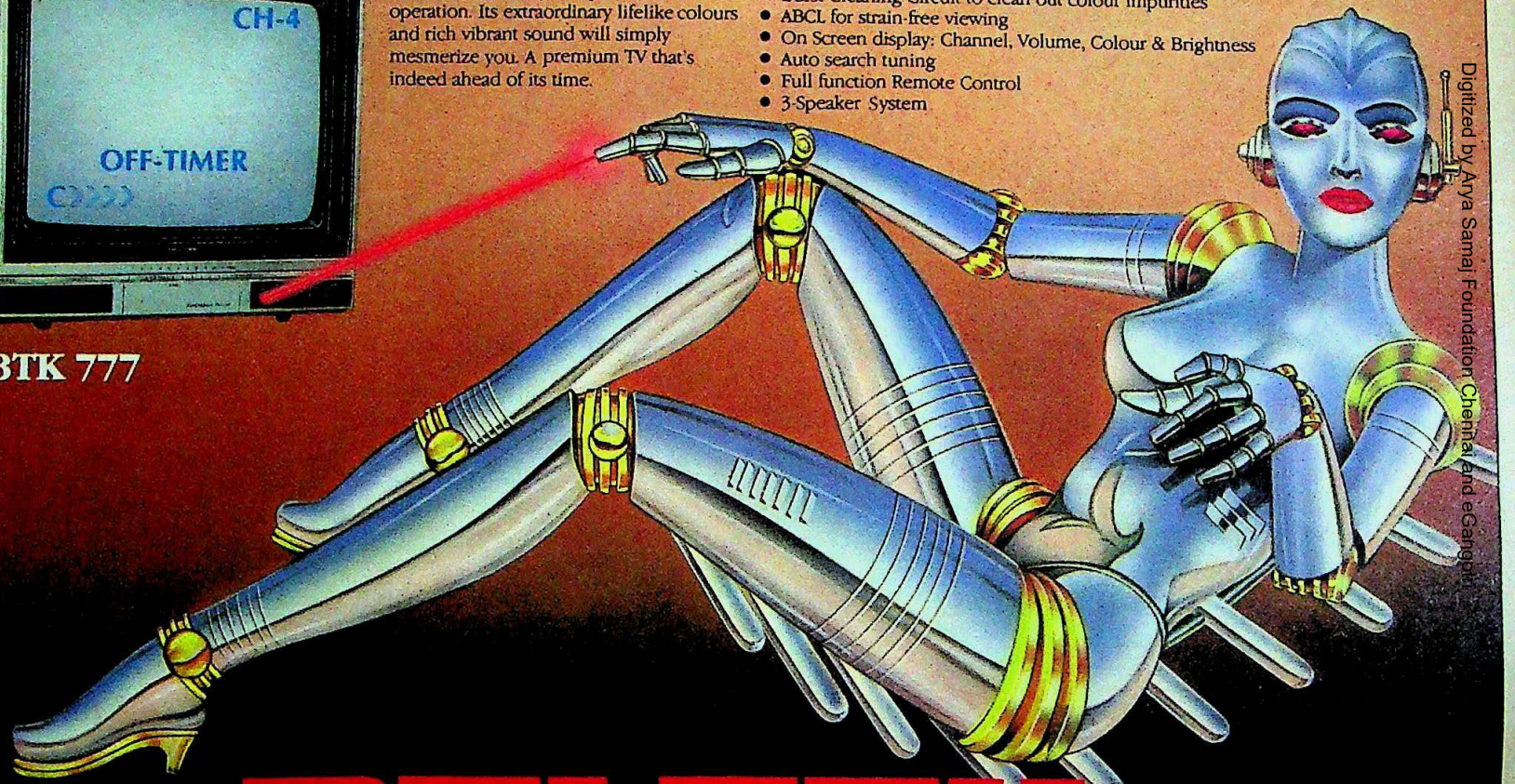

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The Sharp Focus TV

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A glorious chapter in history recalls Allahabad, the nerve centre of India's freedom struggle, that gave a new hope to a nation.

It is never right to submit to evil and national humiliation, and every attempt to impose these must be resisted, whatever the consequences.

Jawaharlal Nehru

Allahabad, the city of the Congress and Nehru, was a proud participant in the country's awakening to a new mass struggle for freedom. In enthusing the people to rise against colonial oppression and cast away the foreign yoke.

The chronicles record that at Allahabad the mighty king, Harshvardhana used to hold an 'Assembly of Moksha' every five years and distribute all his wealth among the poor. Allahabad is the scene of the Kumbh fair at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati. In a serene silence, the Bharadwaj Ashram lies as a spiritual retreat.

Uttar Pradesh evokes the memories of some of the most glorious moments in India's struggle for independence.

Jhansi, poignant with the reminiscences of Rani Lakshmibai who, in her defiance to the British might, came to a tragic end but refused to yield. Bithoor, a mute testimony to the valour of Peshwa Nana Saheb and Tatya Tope, remembering their triumphs and tragedies. Lucknow, where the Residency was sieged for forty-five days by the soldiers of the war of independence. Meerut, where Mangal Pandey rose up in arms against an alien oppressor.

Many a time Uttar Pradesh has emerged from the mist of history and shone with a scintillating brilliance. Its cities and monuments are a witness. Agra, the city of the Mughal splendour. Fatehpur Sikri, Emperor Akbar's deserted capital. Mahoba, the fabled land of the legendary warriors, Alha and Udal.

Accessibility : Lucknow, Agra, Varanasi and Kanpur have direct air connections with the major cities of India. All the places in Uttar Pradesh are linked with a network of rail and road. Inter-state buses and luxury coaches ply between important cities of Uttar Pradesh and other states.

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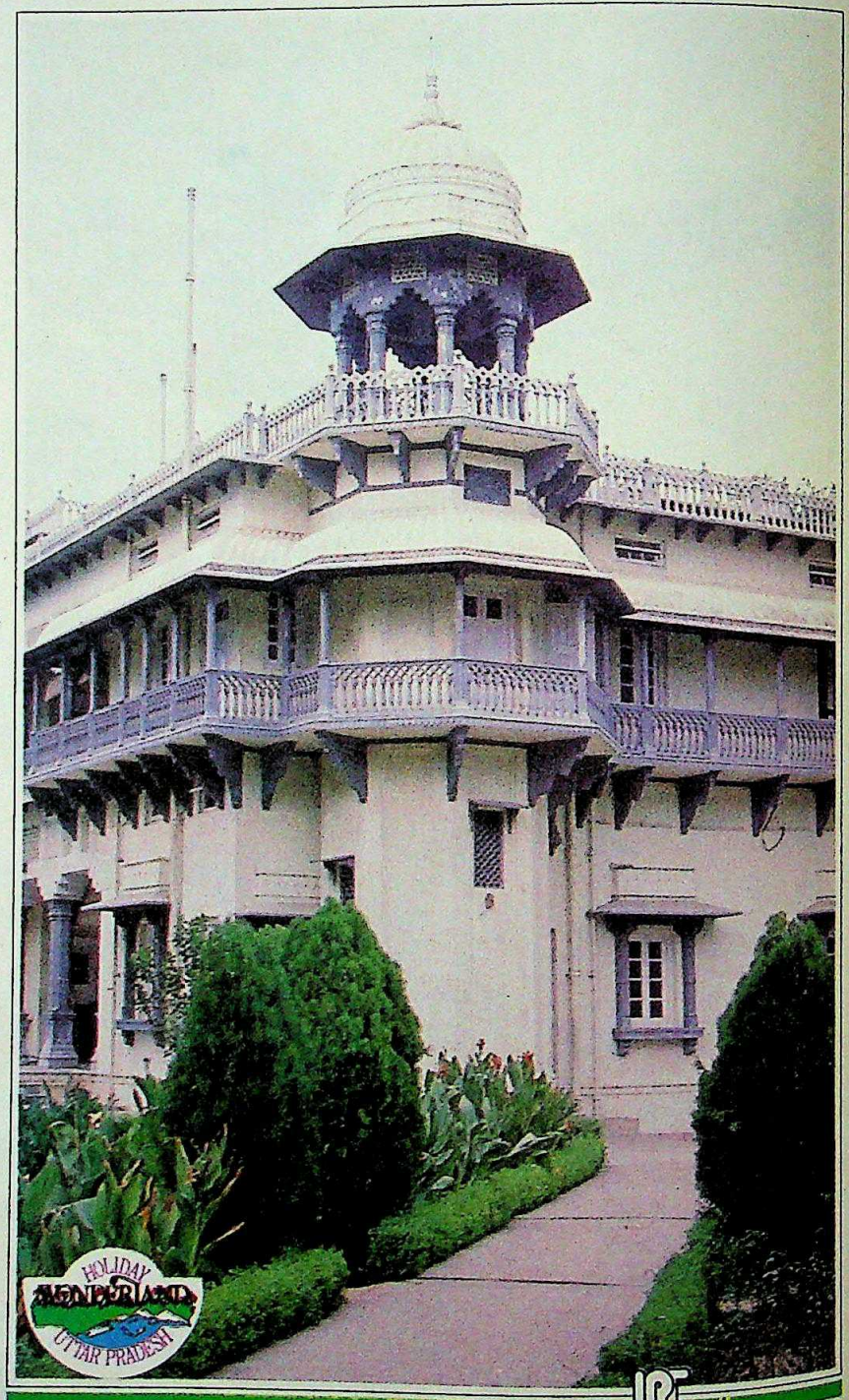
Uttar Pradesh.
The spirit lives on.



Anand Bhawan where the architect of modern India, Jawaharlal Nehru spent his early days.

U.P. Tourism

'Chitrahar', 3 Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow 226 001.

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tor sets at their homes. As a result, many executives do not have to sweat it out in the heat of summer, when power cuts are frequent.

The city's lower cost of living often means that an executive can afford a bigger flat or bungalow than in Delhi or Bombay. For instance, the monthly rent for a four-room bungalow in south Calcutta is still anywhere from Rs 4,000 to Rs 6,000. Further, companies like ITC and Metal Box have their own housing. Here, an executive pays a token rent of Rs 500 a month.

What is more, the club is just a stone's throw from home and the office just a few minutes' drive. Some executives even go home for lunch. Says D.K. Mehra, vice-president of Goodricke: "In Bombay, one has no time left after returning from work to do anything else. And you have to wait for years for a club membership, which is not so in Calcutta. Access to clubs is easier, and there is much more time to socialise."

The annual membership fee at Saturday Club, a favourite executive watering hole, is Rs 7,000 and membership is granted within a month of applying. Up the executive scale is the Bengal Club, where more than one deal has been clinched over a cup of coffee. And the more sporty can join the Calcutta Cricket Club.

Some don't even have to do that. Thanks again to generous managements, they can work out at their own work-place after office hours. For instance, Goodricke has a health club, where executives of all ranks peddle cycles furiously or do push-ups. The company even has a sports doctor on its rolls. Other concerns like Grindlays offer their executives tennis courts. And Calcutta is one of the rare cities where clubs host golf, cricket and even rugby tournaments.

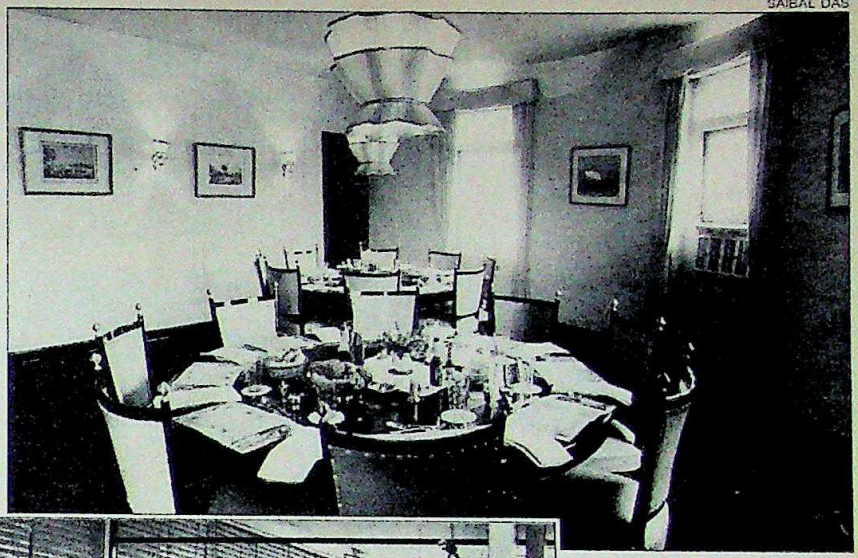
The city has other attractions—a rash of winter parties, some of them thrown by companies. Example: Shaw Wallace has a Christmas and New Year's eve bash every year, complete with dancing to the strains of a live band. Explains party regular Bobby Majumdar: "The old British tradition still continues. Owing to the oppressive heat, British company directors used to come to Calcutta only in winter. Their Indian counterparts would then host a party for them."

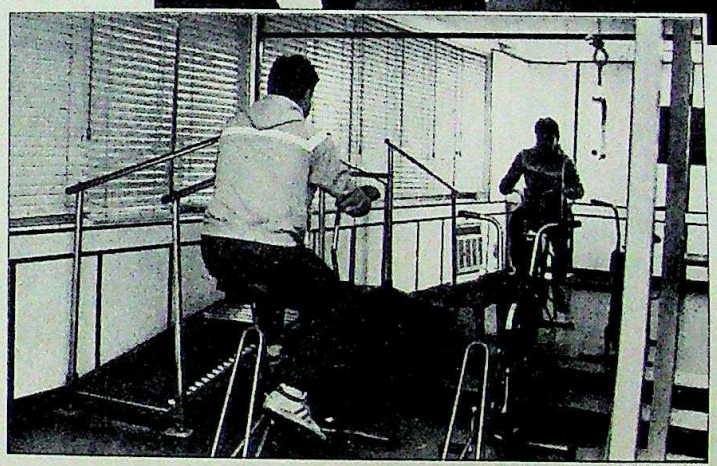
Amidst the easy living, work is a bore—when a cricket or football match is on. In a leading chemicals multinational, junior executives huddle around an office television set, while their seniors sit in their rooms doing precisely the same thing. Asks one executive in irritation: "How can you concentrate when you have a cricket match on television and the whole city is talking about a Kapil Dev sixer?"

For some senior executives, the clincher is the hierarchical office watering holes. At Duncans, the dining-room is strictly for the top brass. But Goodricke has separate halls for middle and upper management while the dining-room for the big boys can seat seven. At Grindlays Bank, the chief manager entertains guests in a special room.

The sumptuous life-styles cost companies loads of money and has probably contributed to the ill-health of concerns like Metal Box. But heads of corporations grin and bear it. Says Kishore Chhabria, managing director of Shaw Wallace:

SAIBAL DAS





SAJAL BOSE

The dining hall at Shaw Wallace; and (left) at the Goodricke health club

"Yes, it costs money. But executives like it like this. It's a long tradition and we still follow it."

Still, not every executive raves about the laid-back existence. Complains a disillusioned tea company executive: "With the rise in demand, tea sells itself. Therefore, you laze around, party and learn nothing. There just is no work pressure." In fact, some of the younger lot leave Calcutta. One who did is Ranjit Gupta Roy, 26, now an accounts executive in an advertising agency in the capital. Says Roy: "The work environment was not very professional. So I left for Delhi." Amit Gupta, director of Structural Water Proofing Company Private Limited, a small chemical concern, quit Calcutta for the capital because he felt that the city's environment did not encourage innovation. "Executives are conservative. So I decided to come to Delhi to set up a new project which I could have put up in Calcutta," says he.

They are the exceptions, however. Said a Delhi-based public sector official who left Calcutta for personal reasons, after working for years with Hindustan Lever: "I would love to go back to Calcutta. It's the only place where you can socialise with anyone—from the peon to the managing director." Clearly, Calcutta is a place in the sun for a good number of executives.

—SURAJEET DAS GUPTA in Calcutta

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THE MARKETS

Bullish Again

Share prices bounce back

THE festival cheer has been much in evidence in the stock-markets. Share prices have resumed their climb, and stock exchange officials are brimming with confidence. They believe that the stock-market boom can be sustained even if the financial institutions stop bolstering prices with their buying.

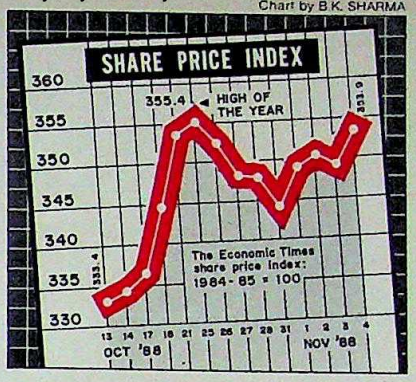
Reflecting the buoyant mood, share price indices shot up last fortnight. On November 4, the last day of the so-called Samvat year, the Bombay Stock Exchange index soared by 45.57 points to 699.75, from 654.18 five days ago. *The Economic Times* index too moved up by 9.3 points, climbing from 344.6 on October 31 to 353.9 on November 4. That was still below the year's high of 355.4 on October 25. But records are being shattered ever so often, and the markets seem poised to notch up a new high.

Certainly, the recent movement of the indices is noteworthy. Earlier, fears had been expressed that the market was in an overbought position. Many punters had been furiously placing purchase orders without taking delivery of shares. There'd been doubts as to whether they could cough up the cash to take delivery—especially if the financial institutions withdrew from the market. Allaying such apprehensions, officials of the Bombay Stock Exchange argued last fortnight that the market was taking off not because of the institutions, but because small investors had started buying shares again. The evidence for this: daily transactions reported on the Bombay exchange have more than doubled, from 15,000 some weeks ago to 40,000 now. The volume of trading would not have shot up this much had the institutions been the only major players.

Nevertheless, officials at more than one stock exchange have been busy pulling up brokers. In Calcutta, the exchange slapped penalties ranging from Rs 50,000 to a whopping Rs 10 lakh on brokers who were in an overbought position. In Bombay, the stock exchange raised the daily margins on 31 shares from 5 per cent of a scrip's value to 7.5 per cent. These were imposed to cool down trading in overheated stock.

Still, this was more a matter of abundant caution in a market where the price bands recommended by an official committee have become obsolete. What is evident is that the underpinnings of the upsurge are sound. A host of corporations—TISCO, Reliance, MRF Tyres, Sri Chakra Tyres, Punjab Tractors, Boot's and Associated Cement are just some examples—have announced improved results and higher dividends. With a general election—and perhaps more official largesse—round the corner, the consensus is that the bulls will continue to reign for quite some months.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 4.11.88	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	63.50	30.25	62.75	nil
Associated Cement	334.00	128.50	332.00	24.00 +
Atlas Copco	66.00	33.50	57.00	6.00 –
Asian Paints	232.50	128.75	215.00	12.50 –
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	382.50	17.50 –
Baroda Rayon	345.00	140.00	305.00	27.50 –
Bata India	86.00	50.50	83.00	2.00 +
Bharat Forge	200.00	101.00	185.00	7.50 –
Birla Jute	50.50	32.25	46.50	3.50 –
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	52.50	1.25 –
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	133.00	9.00 –
Britannia Ind.	121.00	75.00	109.00	8.50 –
Brooke Bond	122.00	75.00	110.00	8.00 –
Century Spinning	1480.00	617.50	1450.00	75.00 +
Chloride India	80.50	59.00	76.00	1.00 +
Colgate	333.75	160.00	327.50	2.50 +
Cyanamid	72.50	33.00	62.50	5.00 –
DCM	55.00	28.00	43.25	1.75 –
Dunlop	86.50	66.00	85.00	3.50 +
E.I. Hotels	62.50	38.00	56.00	1.00 +
Escorts	71.50	37.00	64.50	0.50 +
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	390.00	13.75 –
Food Specialities	178.75	93.50	170.00	0.50 +
Garware Nylon	56.00	20.00	47.00	5.00 –
G.E. Shipping	43.75	20.50	43.00	2.50 +
Gujarat St Fertilisers	172.00	75.00	148.75	5.00 +
Grasim Ind.	118.00	74.00	81.00	2.00 +
Hind. Aluminium	139.00	73.00	125.00	1.00 +
Hind. Ciba	691.00	332.50	640.00	30.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	111.25	8.75 –
Hindustan Lever	92.00	59.50	83.00	5.00 –
Hindustan Motors	34.00	15.80	31.30	1.20 –
IEL	59.50	31.00	55.00	4.00 +
Indian Organic	47.50	15.00	43.00	2.00 –
Indian Rayon	86.00	46.00	80.50	0.50 –
Indrol	291.25	133.75	270.00	10.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	370.00	205.00	320.00	25.00 –
ITC	64.00	30.00	50.75	3.75 –
J.K. Synthetics	90.00	45.50	85.00	2.50 –*
Kinetic Engineering	410.00	161.25	346.25	6.25 +
Kirloskar Cummins	88.75	48.00	78.75	3.75 –
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	325.00	2.50 –
Larsen & Toubro	148.50	75.50	130.00	6.50 –
Lipton	81.00	52.00	77.00	3.00 +
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	14.00	0.50 +
Madura Coats	94.00	59.00	94.00	0.50 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	120.00	48.50	119.50	12.50 +
Milk Food	290.00	72.50	255.00	22.50 –
Motor Industries	700.00	447.50	650.00	30.00 –
Mukand Iron	120.00	72.50	115.00	2.00 –
National Organic	910.50	390.00	910.00	40.00 +
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	12.50	1.00 –
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	39.50	nil
Peico Electronics	40.00	24.50	31.50	4.25 –
Pfizer	90.00	50.00	79.00	9.00 –
Premier Auto	55.50	23.00	55.50	7.00 +**
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	75.00	2.00 –
Raymond	96.00	41.50	64.00	1.00 +
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	177.00	9.00 –
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	81.50	5.00 +
Shriram Fibres	62.50	32.50	55.75	4.75 +
Siemens India	116.00	56.00	110.00	nil
SKF Bearings	2316.00	1058.00	2300.00	110.00 +
SPIC	60.25	23.50	53.50	0.50 +
Tata Steel	1047.50	568.75	1047.50	60.00 +
Telco	785.00	340.00	735.00	5.00 –
Vam Organic	143.00	75.00	130.00	7.00 –
Voltas	500.00	225.00	450.00	35.00 +
Wimco	30.00	11.00	26.00	3.00 –
Videocon Int.	62.00	18.00	62.00	15.00 +

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**Ex-dividend

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	12.5095	12.3800
Austria	Schilling	100	1.2048	1.1893
Bahrain	Dinar	1	38.6922	38.6091
Bangladesh	Taka	100	47.4220	47.3660
Canada	Dollar	1	12.3322	12.2077
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.1937	2.1701
Egypt	Pound	1	6.3928	6.3128
France	Franc	1	2.5189	2.4510
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.9280	1.9093
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0800	0.0760
Iran	Rial	100	20.6122	20.5091
Italy	Lira	100	1.0400	1.000
Japan	Yen	100	12.2549	11.9474
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8000	0.7600
Kuwait	Dinar	1	51.1020	50.9200
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.6100	5.5536
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.0500	1.0000
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6612	0.6026
Netherlands	Guilder	1	7.5019	7.4218
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8026	0.7431
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.5927	7.5152
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1200	0.1000
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4220	0.3900
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.4400	2.4125
Switzerland	Franc	1	10.0862	10.0000
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1400	0.1300
Thailand	Baht	100	57.7620	57.7020
UK	Pound	1	26.6312	26.4901
USA	Dollar	1	15.0602	14.9142
UAE	Dirham	1	4.0010	3.9001
USSR	Rouble	1	16.8939	16.6070
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	8.5837	8.3682

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 4.11.88.

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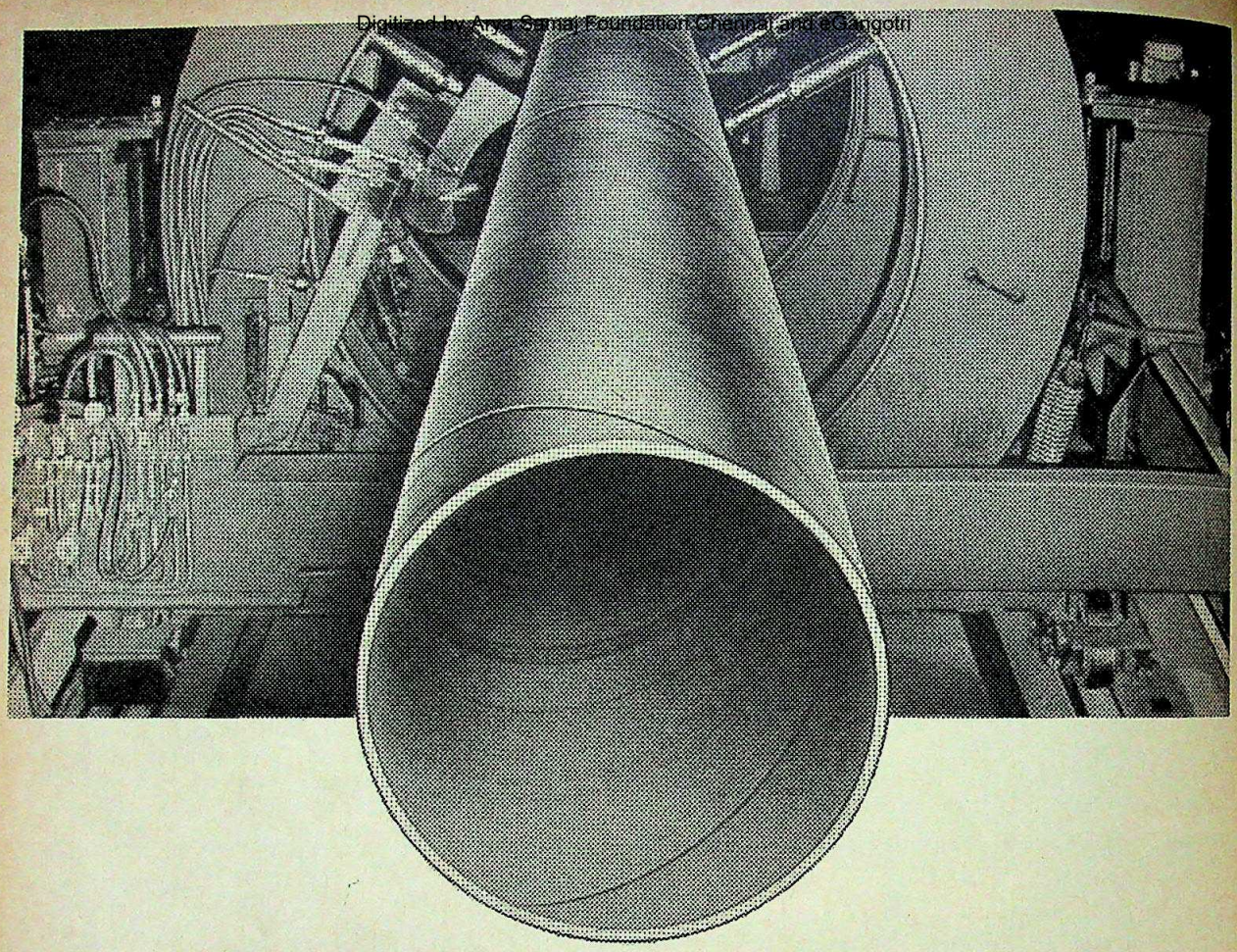

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First in strength. First in value. First in hi-tech features.

Large diameter spiral welded pipes. The only one of this kind in India. It established Rourkela as one of the few manufacturers of the finest and high-tech steel pipes in the world.

Named for its unique spiral-welded strengths—a result of advanced submerged arc welding technology—SW pipes are famous for their precision and capability of taking high-stress loads.

Spiral Welded Pipes from Rourkela changed the very notion of what steel pipes mean in the country.

Sophisticated ultrasonic and X-ray fluoroscopy testing ensures flawless construction and long-and-trouble-free performance even under tough operating conditions. That's why SW pipes from Rourkela are the first choice for water supply schemes, oil, petroleum and gas pipelines, irrigation, sewerage et al.

More importantly, Spiral Welded Pipes from Rourkela are readily available in a range of size and in all grades including API from the 16" (406.6 mm) outer diameter to the large dia 64" (1625.6 mm) pipes, and in a variety of wall thicknesses.

Professionals in every sphere have acclaimed the versatility of Spiral Welded Pipes and put it to innovative uses even outside pipeline construction. The invisible leaders continue to lead.

STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LIMITED
CENTRAL MARKETING ORGANISATION

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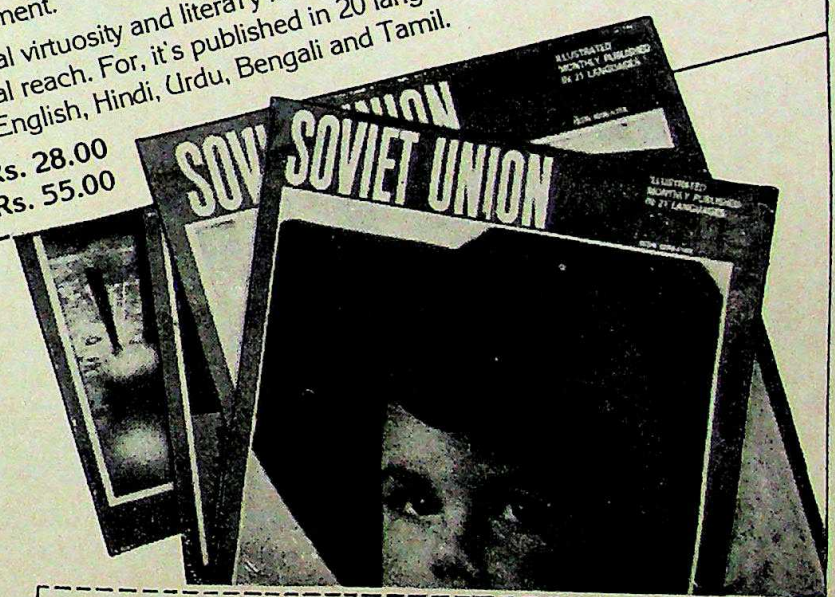

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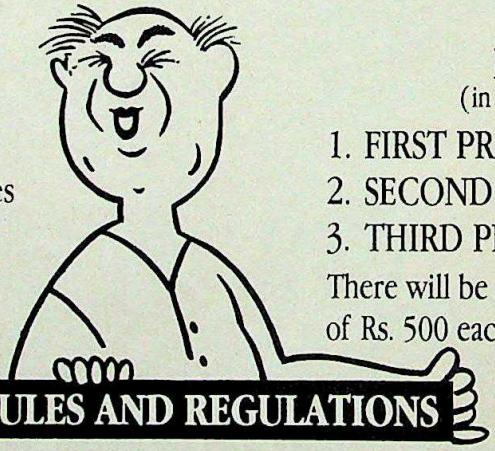
THE HINDUSTAN TIMES ANNUAL CARTOON CONTEST 1989

The Hindustan Times is beating the drums again to call all gifted amateur cartoonists from 18 to 80 who may have a talent for making people laugh. Come, show your skill.

THEME :

1. THE ELECTIONS
2. Caricatures of prominent Indian/foreign personalities

DEADLINE :
Tuesday, January 31, 1989



PRIZES
(in each category)

1. FIRST PRIZE : Rs. 15,000
2. SECOND PRIZE : Rs. 10,000
3. THIRD PRIZE : Rs. 5,000

There will be 10 consolation prizes of Rs. 500 each.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. The contest is open to amateur, non-professional Indian cartoonists above the age of 18 years. (Those who earn a living from cartooning are not eligible. Please attach a signed declaration that you are not a professional cartoonist).
2. All works must be original and unpublished.
3. The size of the cartoon should not exceed 30x50 cm. or be less than 20x30 cm.
4. Each entrant should indicate name, age, address, occupation, telephone number (if any) on the reverse side, in BLOCK LETTERS.
5. Each contestant may take part in either contest or both, but submit no more than THREE entries in EACH category. All caricatures should be identified on the reverse side.
6. All prize-winning entries will become the property of The Hindustan Times. The Hindustan Times reserves the right to reproduce the award-winning cartoons in newspapers and magazines published by the HT Group.
7. All entries should be on white drawing paper and in black, waterproof ink. All drawings should be neat and clean. No drawings in colour will qualify.
8. The decision of the Jury will be final and irrevocable.
9. The results of the contest will be published in The Hindustan Times dated March 12, 1989 (Dak editions : March 13)

JURY FOR THE 1989 CONTEST

CHAIRPERSON : DR. RAJA RAMANNA
MEMBERS : NASEERUDDIN SHAH, APARNA SEN, SIDDARTH BASU, ABU ABRAHAM AND SUDHIR DAR

Entries should be addressed to : THE HINDUSTAN TIMES ANNUAL CARTOON CONTEST
18-20, KASTURBA GANDHI MARG, NEW DELHI-110 001

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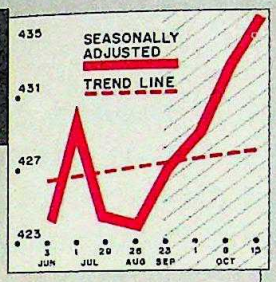
Prices are an increasing cause for concern. The current contra-seasonal price increases need to be investigated particularly since they follow a good monsoon. Industrial production is growing at a healthy pace and share prices reflect optimism in this sector. However, any further decline in electricity generation as took place last month may create bottlenecks in the system.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
0.95% p.a.

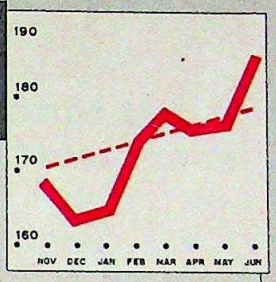


After a period of quiescence, prices showed a distinct tendency to rise again rather sharply last fortnight.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
8.0% p.a.

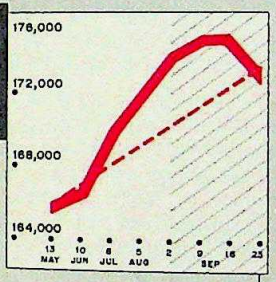


Industrial production went up sharply last month. With increased demand from farmers the outlook for industry looks good.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
14.31% p.a.

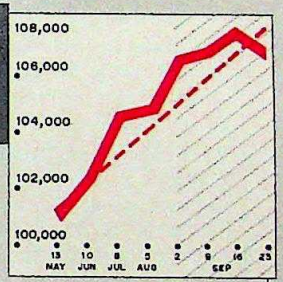


Last fortnight saw money supply remain well under control and there was a decline in the long-term trend which had gone up to 14.9%.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.5% p.a.

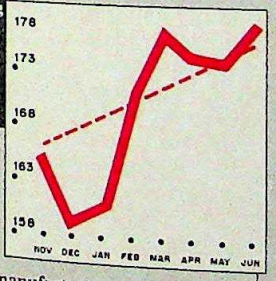


Credit conditions are not very tight with a more liberal policy that has been adopted by the Reserve Bank.

Manufacturing Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
9.6% p.a.

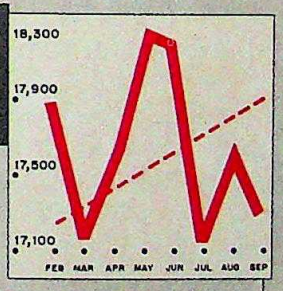


Output in the manufacturing sector increased last month to maintain a healthy long-term growth rate.

Electricity Generation

Million kwh

Current Trend
6.6% p.a.

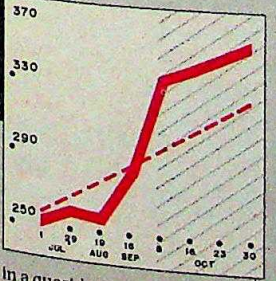


Electricity generation has not yet picked up to the extent expected after a good monsoon—last month saw a drop.

Share Price Index

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
72.2% p.a.



Share prices are in a quasi-boom making shares an attractive investment—last fortnight saw a 4 per cent increase.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
1.2% p.a.

Gold prices are rising only slowly—making it a much less attractive investment than shares at the moment.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the 1st fortnight of October 1988

	% Growth
Copra	36.54
Rubber	16.61
Gram	15.70
Chillies	15.44
Oranges	15.39
Fish	14.01
Moong	11.26
Eggs	9.15
Groundnut Seeds	9.13
Formulations	8.60
Urad	8.60
Bananas	8.41
Groundnut Oil	7.54
Solvent Extracted Oil	6.86
Groundnut Oil Cake	6.64
Linseed	6.58
Iron Ore	6.50
Cashew Nuts	6.05
Steal Furniture	5.84
Tapioca	5.60
Sugar	3.89
Gur	3.70
Boilers	3.60
Gingelly Oil	3.44
Wheat	3.26
Cotton Raw	2.34
Silk Raw	2.05
Lime Stone	2.03
Meat	1.92
Butter	1.76
Maize	1.56
Cotton Yarn	1.42
Barley	1.38
Vanaspati	1.28
Art Silk and Artificial Silk	1.28
Furnace Oil	1.24
Tea	1.22
Lubricating Oil	1.18
Mining Machinery	1.15
Diesel Oil	1.13
Rice	1.12
Cotton Seed	1.01
Alta	0.92
Jowar	0.92
Mustard Oil	0.92

Of the 139 series considered, 90 of them with a total weight of 60.215 had a positive growth and 48 of them with a total weight of 25.830 had a negative growth. 1 of them showed no growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Coal		
Thousand Tonnes, September	14133	12650
Saleable Steel		
Thousand Tonnes, September	721.4	684.0
Cement		
Thousand Tonnes, September	3314	3202
Fertilisers		
Thousand Tonnes, September	746.3	513.5
Revenue Earning Traffic		
Million Tonnes, September	22.98	21.21

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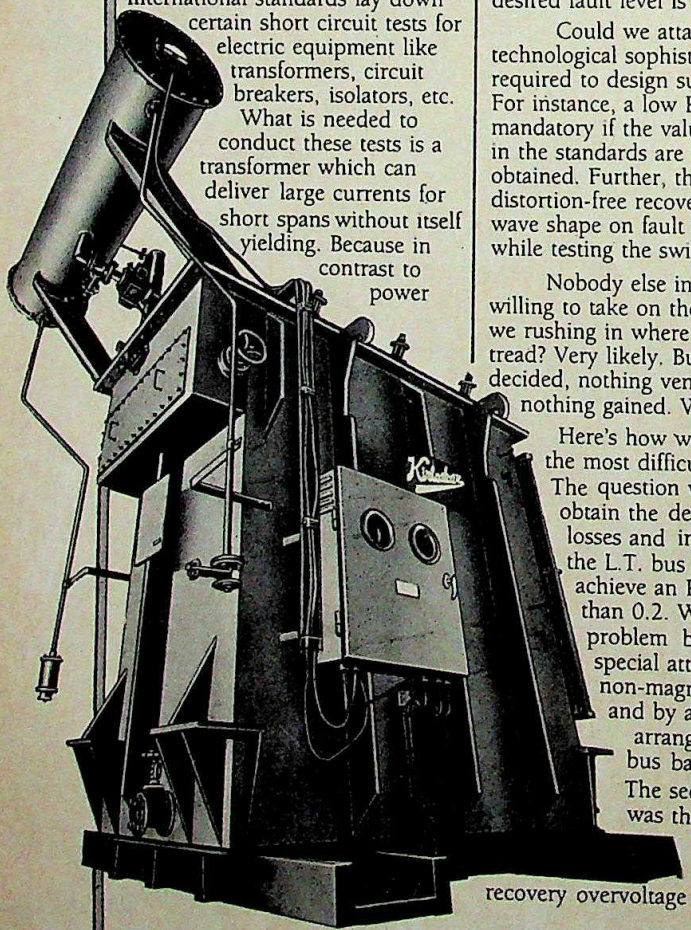
The Kirloskar Electric Challenge Series

It's no state secret that Kirloskar Electric is the leading manufacturer of special transformers in the country.

But did you know that Kirloskar Electric makes such high quality transformers for dynamic short circuit testing of low voltage switchgear that even our competitors use them to test their equipment?

The Central Power Research Institute, the premier electrical testing institute in the country, asked us to design a transformer for dynamic short circuit testing of low-voltage switchgear. So far such units had only been imported.

As you know Indian and international standards lay down certain short circuit tests for electric equipment like transformers, circuit breakers, isolators, etc. What is needed to conduct these tests is a transformer which can deliver large currents for short spans without itself yielding. Because in contrast to power transformers, these transformers have to undergo short circuit forces a large number of times, every single day. Whether the transformer gets its power from a generator or directly from high voltage lines, the source impedance must be low enough so that the desired fault level is sustainable.



Could we attain the technological sophistication required to design such a unit? For instance, a low R/X ratio is mandatory if the values specified in the standards are to be obtained. Further, there must be a distortion-free recovery voltage wave shape on fault interruption while testing the switchgear.

Nobody else in India was willing to take on the job. Were we rushing in where angels fear to tread? Very likely. But, we decided, nothing ventured, nothing gained. We said yes.

Here's how we overcame the most difficult problems. The question was, how to obtain the desired copper losses and impedance in the L.T. bus bars and achieve an R/X ratio of less than 0.2. We resolved the problem by paying special attention to the non-magnetic shielding, and by a unique arrangement of the bus bars.

The second hurdle was the distortion in the wave shape of recovery overvoltage due to the magnetising inrush current. To eliminate this distortion, CPRI and we together found a solution by selecting a source whose fault level was high and by connecting all series reactances on the secondary side of the transformer.

Our efforts paid off. The Central Power Research Institute approved our transformer. But the best pat on our backs was the one given by other transformer manufacturers. They bought short circuit testing transformers from us to test their own switchgear upto 70 kiloamps.

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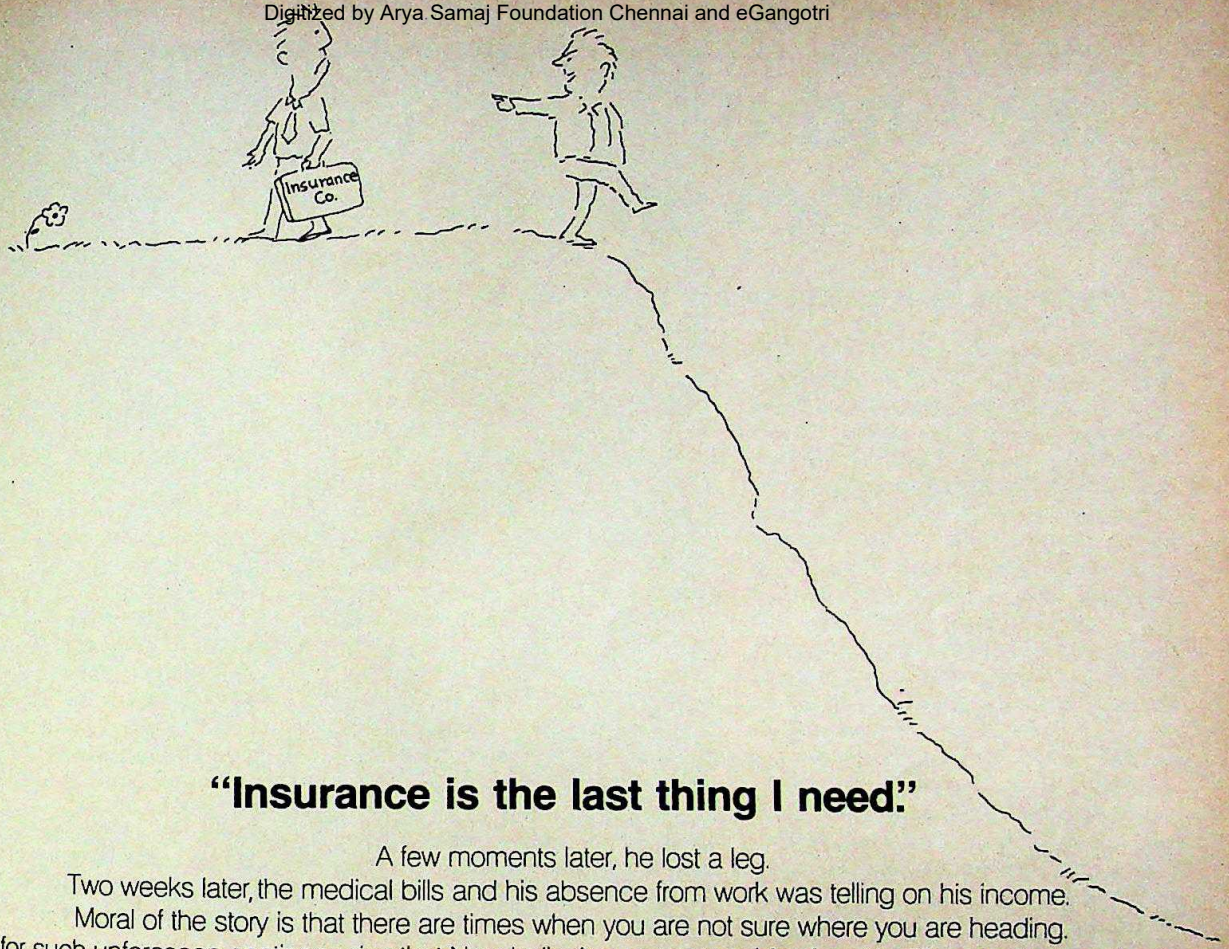

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ZUBIN MEHTA

The End of the Honeymoon

A tempestuous musical union comes to an end

PARSIS proudly refer to him as "*aapro* (our own) Zubin"; Los Angeles lovingly calls him "Zubi baby"; and the American press goes to town variously dubbing 52-year-old New York Philharmonic music director Zubin Mehta "Lochinvar of the West!", "Omar Sharif of the serious music world," even "virtuoso glamour boy conductor" whose "hot eyes" and "brutal charm" give him "the sex appeal of an Italian beach boy". He has long thrilled American socialites with his "dashing good looks, exotic oriental (Parsi-Indian) background," his "fashion-plate poses," his "charismatic personality" and his "legendary flair and flamboyance".

When he moved to New York in 1978, critics wondered just how long this honeymoon would last. Now we have the answer: the tempestuous union of music director Zubin Mehta and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra will end in 1991, after an association of 13 years, as Mehta declined last week to renew his contract with the Philharmonic beyond the 1990-'91 season. No other music director in the history of the New York Philharmonic has stayed this long; arguably, none other has stirred quite as much controversy. A personality as strong as Mehta's only arouses strong feelings. Over the years he has faced a barrage of barbs from a section of critics and connoisseurs in the cultural capital of the US. As early as 1983—when his contract was first up for renewal—it had become evident that Mehta had serious problems within the Philharmonic. A questionnaire distributed by the orchestra's artistic committee was leaked to the press. Its results were unflattering: most players took a dim view of Mehta.

Still, there is no doubt that Mehta's tenure in the Big Apple has helped make this Bombay-born, Vienna-trained Indian one of the most well known and frequently interviewed musicians in the world—a darling of the press. And with an income estimated at over $500,000 (Rs 70 lakh) a year, he is among the highest paid conductors in America.

Mehta came to New York because, as he once colorfully put it, "I had *sitzfleisch* (ants-in-the-pants)" and because "New York is really the place to be, the centre of the world, the lion's den." Characteristically, he caused a furore before he moved here by declaring his own orchestra of that time—the Los Angeles Philharmonic—"the Rolls Royce of orchestras". Once he arrived, however, the New York musicians were "unanimous in our delight with him"—no mean compliment, considering the New York Philharmonic's long held reputation as a make-or-break assignment for conductors. These musicians are phenomenal stars who are known to be difficult, tough individuals, intolerant of conductors they don't like or respect. In making music with them, Mehta's job has had an element of lion-taming and, as can be expected, it has not been totally smooth sailing all the way. He's had to contend with many players who feel "we've deteriorated considerably since Mehta came". One music critic quoted a senior orchestra member as saying: "The ensemble is not as good

INTERVIEW

"It is time to move on"

SHORTLY after announcing his controversial decision—which was splashed in all major American dailies—that he would not be renewing his contract with the New York Philharmonic, the charismatic Zubin Mehta refused to give any interviews to the media. He, however, agreed to speak to INDIA TODAY. *Excerpts:*

Q. Why have you decided not to renew your contract?

A. By 1991, I will have been music director in north America for 30 years. After being in one ambience so long, it's time to move. I think I'd like to move more towards Europe. Being a music director in America is a very strenuous activity—especially in New York. At the moment, I am fine, but in '91, after 13 years here, I envision I will not want to continue, and I must let the management know two and a half years in advance so that they can find a successor.

Q. Where will you work in Europe?

A. I'm not looking out for a job. I was offered three prestigious positions—I turned them all down because I don't want to be music director. Now, this doesn't mean I don't want to conduct an orchestra. It is the administrative duties that go with being a music director that I want to take a break from.

Q. What are the duties of a music director that you find so strenuous?

A. For example, right now I am planning the whole of the next season. That means not only my programmes but those of the guest conductors as well. I have to plan the day-by-day scheduling of the rehearsals of the orchestra, organise recording sessions, engage guest conductors and soloists. And I am not free in America to do as I please—we have a labour contract. Everything must fit into what is agreed upon with the labour unions. At times, this can be quite suffocating. We've just signed a new contract with the orchestra—a new set of rules, over and above what we had to live with last year. American musicians are very giving—they have the highest standard in the world—but they are also very demanding in their conditions.

Q. Where will you be based?

A. In Los Angeles. I have my home there. I feel physically at home there as I have never done in New York. I love the creativity of New York, but I don't enjoy the city—I don't like living here.

Q. Have you felt that New York critics have been harsh in judging you?

A. Well, of course, nobody lives here without being criticised. It isn't naive to wish it wouldn't be so, but this difference of opinion is part and parcel of this city.... *The New York Times'* reviews of my work have been evenly divided—favourable and unfavourable. Critics do their job and I take their criticism seriously.

Q. How does the management of the Philharmonic feel about your not renewing your contract?

A. They'd offered me a renewal before summer. It took all summer to think

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The master at his work: controversial

because he thrashes wildly with the stick whether it's Mozart or Mahler."

That, however, hasn't deterred Mehta from being a special success with the audiences who have found his magnetism and his dashing podium manner very appealing. Live telecasts, made possible by state-of-the-art technology, have brought this expressive conductor's face into the intimacy of New York homes and his outstretched arms have seemed to enfold all in an enormous bear hug. Even though it is generally agreed that he has not been the huge audience hit that former conductor Leonard Bernstein was, Mehta has managed to raise the Philharmonic's "subscriptions" (season tickets) from 27,000 in 1978 to 35,000 by 1987. Attendance at concerts has remained at a high of 95 per cent capacity. And in this financially astute city, where "kulchur" is ultimately not a matter of government subsidies but of patron dollars and cents, it is acknowledged that "by the numbers, Zubin Mehta is a success".

Under Mehta's directorship, the New York Philharmonic has undertaken many international tours—through Asia, Latin America, the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc—that have been enormous critical successes. He has taken it over; I spoke to many friends; it's not a snap decision. My wife still doesn't think I've made the right decision—she loves it here. But I make my own decisions and it's time to move on. I need a break from the kind of work I've been doing. I want to do other things in my life—things I've neglected. One needs time off from this perpetual motion one gets into. Spiritually, it's necessary to have time to study, to rethink. During my sabbatical last year, I did more opera, more touring, less contemporary music. I did things out of my routine and I enjoyed that.

Q. Does India feature in your plans?

A. Definitely. As early as next April, I'm taking the European Community Youth Orchestra to India for the Nehru centennial celebration. I look forward to that very much. With the best young musicians from the 10 European countries, this gets to be one of the world's finest orchestras. Four thousand youngsters (aged 15-25) on their way to becoming professional musicians audition, and an orchestra of 140 is formed from these applicants every year. When they offered to go with me to India, I gave up my vacation to do that. We'll give concerts in the stadiums in the four major cities because I strongly believe that we should not play only to select audiences—we should play for the people. The ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) is organising this tour and Ravi Shankar will play with us.

> "India definitely features in my plans. Next April, I am taking the European Community Youth Orchestra to India for the Nehru centennial celebration. I look forward to that very much."

Q. Even after 1991, you will continue to be the music director of the Israel Philharmonic. Isn't that strenuous?

A. Yes, but that I do out of love, not for prestige or for economic gain. That's my donation. I donate one-third of my time to these people and their cause...

Q. Why do you feel so strongly about Israel?

A. Israel and its people remind me of India...the orchestra, and the country itself, is like a warm, close-knit family. It's one of my spiritual homes. I've grown up with them. I've been there since '61. I feel they need me. They are a very young people and they make the mistakes of a young country. They are 40 years old and no other country has had so many wars on their soil in 40 years. What's happening there now is a disaster but, hopefully, they'll come out of it. I don't just go there and embrace everything they do.

Q. Will you have any regrets on leaving the New York Philharmonic?

A. I will be sorry to leave because I've built the Philharmonic into the greatest orchestra in the world, and I don't think I'll have such an orchestra to direct again for a long time.

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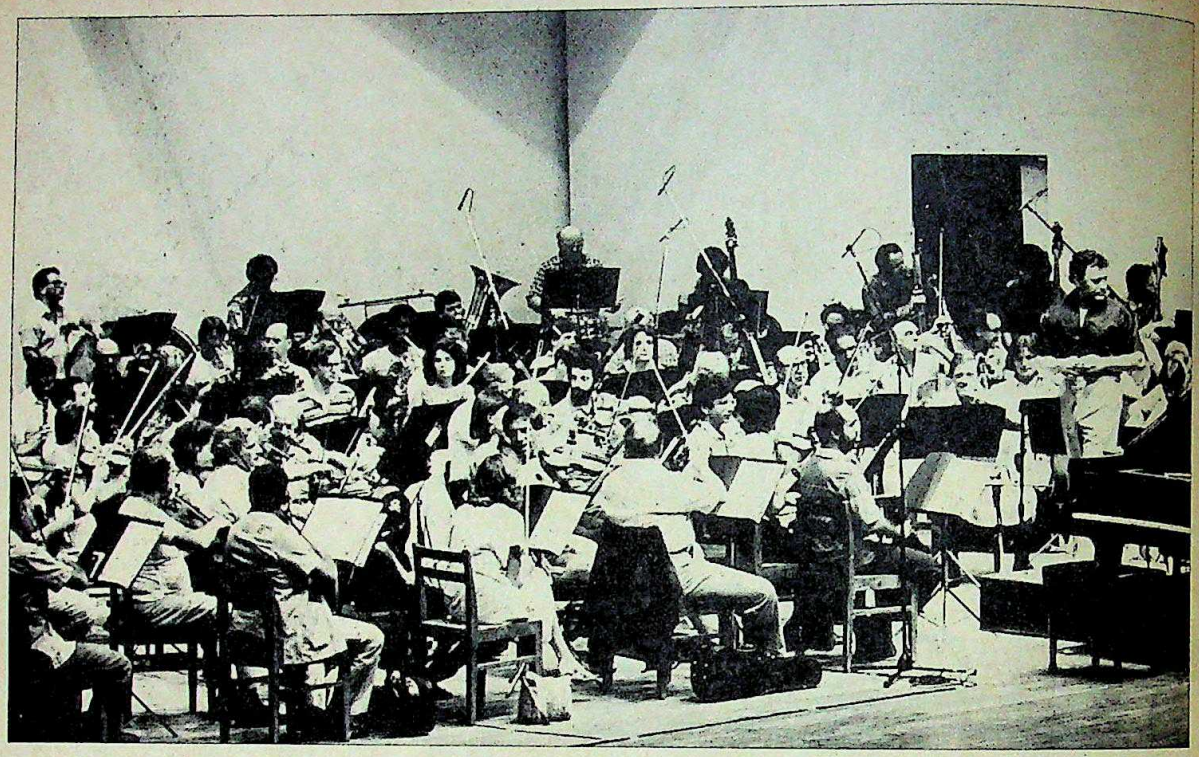

Conducting his orchestra at New Delhi: strong ties

classical music to the masses by playing free *al fresco* concerts in New York's Central Park where mammoth audiences can be accommodated. Championing special programming for minority audiences, he took his elite orchestra and famous black soprano Leontyne Price to Harlem's cavernous Abyssinian Baptist Church and performed Handel's *Messiah* (with the church's own choir providing the 125-voice chorus) to thumpingly appreciative audiences. He has done special performances ("Happy Concerts for Young People") and lecture-demonstrations for children—even lending his baton and orchestra, at one memorable Lincoln Center Performance, to a 12-year-old novice who volunteered from the audience to conduct in place of the maestro! Mehta has furthered serious music education by promoting cooperation between the Philharmonic and the Juilliard School of Music where aspiring young musicians from all over the US come for professional training. Finally, he has reshaped the Philharmonic's conservative make-up by hiring more women and more young musicians, while putting his own stamp on the orchestra by personally auditioning new players (as opposed to "pirating" established ones from other orchestras). It is a credit to him that the competition for openings is so fierce that 60 to 80 players have been known to audition for a single spot.

Musically, Mehta's experiments have ranged from combining his two full-size orchestras (the New York and the Israel Philharmonics) in one daring program (Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, appropriately enough) to commissioning a sitar concerto from Ravi Shankar and inviting him to play it with the New York Philharmonic.

MUSIC critics, however, have not been as consistently enthusiastic about Mehta's career in New York as his audiences. He has been praised for his technical virtuosity, but his interpretations have been faulted for occasional insensitivity and superficiality. High-powered critics and intellectual listeners who comprise the musical intelligentsia in this cruelly competitive city have accused Mehta of being "on automatic pilot" and offering "push-button programming". Even as they have praised him for being an "expert craftsman," they wish he would not "stand outside the music". "He rarely falls below an acceptable level of professional competence," says *The New York Times* music critic Donal Henahan; and yet, "this talented musician rarely gives the impression that he feels deeply or strongly about the music he conducts". At his best, as in Moscow this past summer, he can rouse his orchestra to superb performances. As another New York critic once put it: "When he is in the mood... (Mehta) can pull together a brilliantly paced and carefully balanced reading that challenges the best of his colleagues." But he has not changed the Philharmonic's "jaded" image, nor consistently inspired these brilliant high-calibre musicians to accomplish their full performing potential. Complaints of "functional but uninspired music making," have not been uncommon.

But New York critics are, as a rule, notoriously hard to please and as one of them charitably concluded: "Conducting is an impossible job, requiring the brutality of a corporate executive and the soul of a poet, and perhaps we expect too much of those who fill the job. Mr Mehta has used his skills and personality admirably, and he can make this difficult orchestra's assemblage of skill and temperament pay him heed. Expecting him to be a profound musician as well may be a little greedy." In New York's big bad artworld, however, the cognoscenti expect nothing less than absolute perfection, generating the kind of performance pressures that will make anyone, even a maestro such as Mehta, feel like getting away from it all.

—VIBHUTI PATEL in New York

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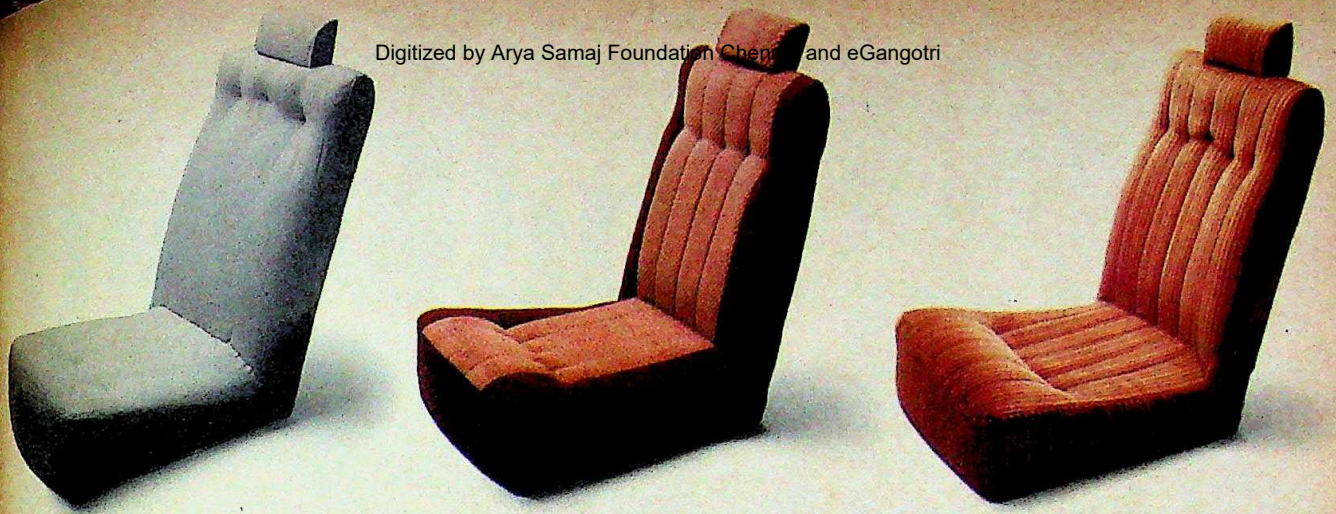

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CINEMA

The Day oth

He walks like the devil himself. Down the stern of the snow-white ship he moves, all black and towering, the thigh-high gold buckles glinting in the harsh October sun. As if it were High Noon, and he enroute to a duel—on board the naval ship.

Below, on Bombay's ferry docks, people push their fists through the iron bars and cheer lustily: "Mogambo, Mogambo, say Mogambo *khush hua*." Amrish Puri, the Shahenshah of the expanding kingdom of villainy, turns and waves, like a benevolent dictator, to the upturned faces of the masses.

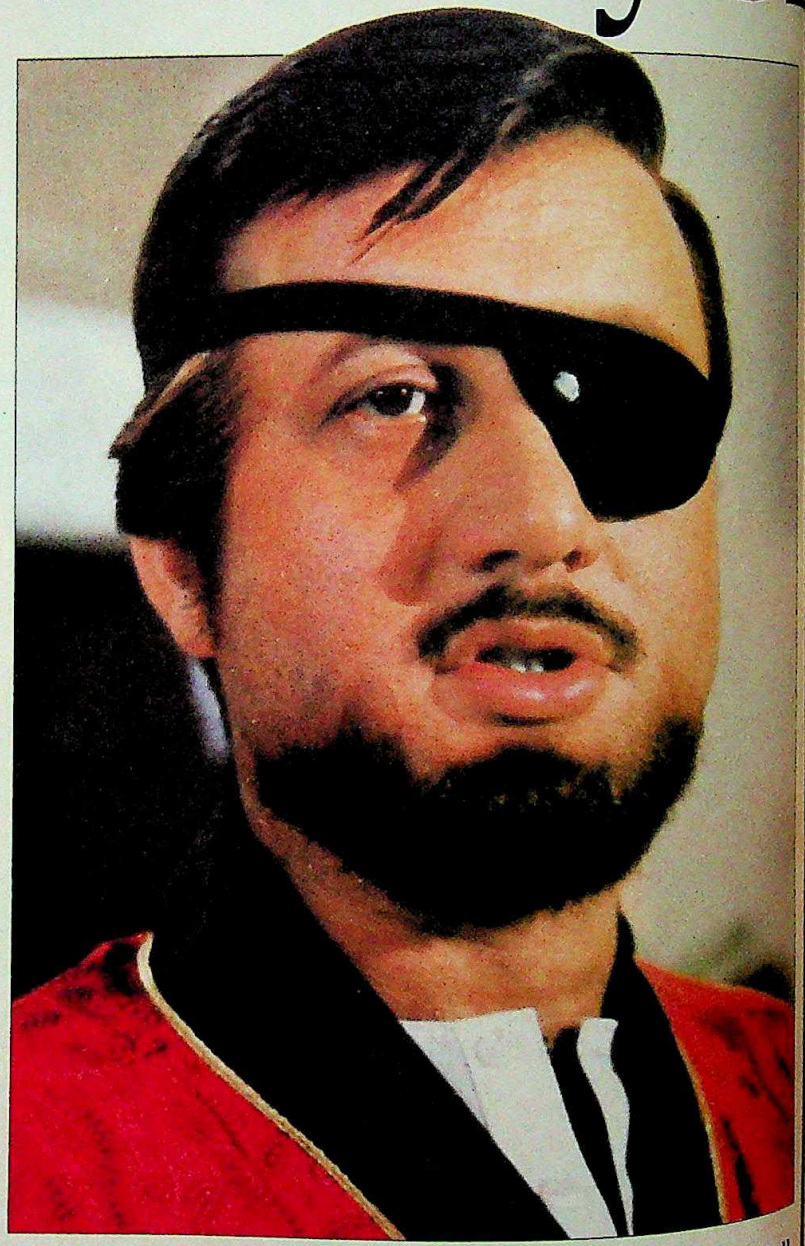
It is now good to be bad. Villains are *in*. A devilish change has overtaken and is transforming Indian cinema. Villainy isn't what it used to be. Villains have become lovable, cuddly even. They now open charity shows. They have even become sex symbols.

From the sinister boogey man used to scare children, the villain is becoming the pied piper—luring children to consumer land. Gabbar Singh's a monster and all bad in *Sholay*. Yet, the biscuit which is his *asli pasand* in the advertisements, becomes everybody's real favourite. Mogambo in *Mr India* wants to destroy India with his nuclear missiles. But admen use his lines to sell mosquito coils.

This was never so. When the past king of villains, Pran whipped Dilip Kumar almost to a pulp in *Ram Aur Shyam*—his ice-blue fake eyes glaring menacingly—the audience felt real fear. Kanhaiya Lal in *Mother India* made this fear goose-pimpingly palpable, as did K.N. Singh earlier, blowing those evil smoke-rings and striking terror in the heart of young Raj Kapoor in *Awaara*. Jayant and Hira Lal gave the shivers too.

A villain on screen was thought to be one off it too. Even the name Pran was taboo. Says Pran: "A study done in north India shows that nobody named their sons Pran during the 25 years I was a villain." When he walked on streets, "people hurled abuses and threw stones at me". Similarly, when Prem Chopra, a screen rape specialist, walked down those streets, he heard people say: "Hide your wives, Prem Chopra is coming."

Today, in *Mr India* the many-ringed, evil-eyed Amrish Puri asks his henchman to jump into bubbling-hot red fluid. In seconds they are reduced to a pair of grinning skulls. People laugh and the children clap. And when they see *him* they grab him. Especially the children. "People



Anupam Kher in *Haar Jeet*: evil-eyed and chillingly real

The heroes have become somewhat lustreless and dull. The villain, on the other hand, has a gaudy but mesmerising glitter about him. They open charity shows, they have become the trend-setters, sex symbols even. It is now good to be bad.

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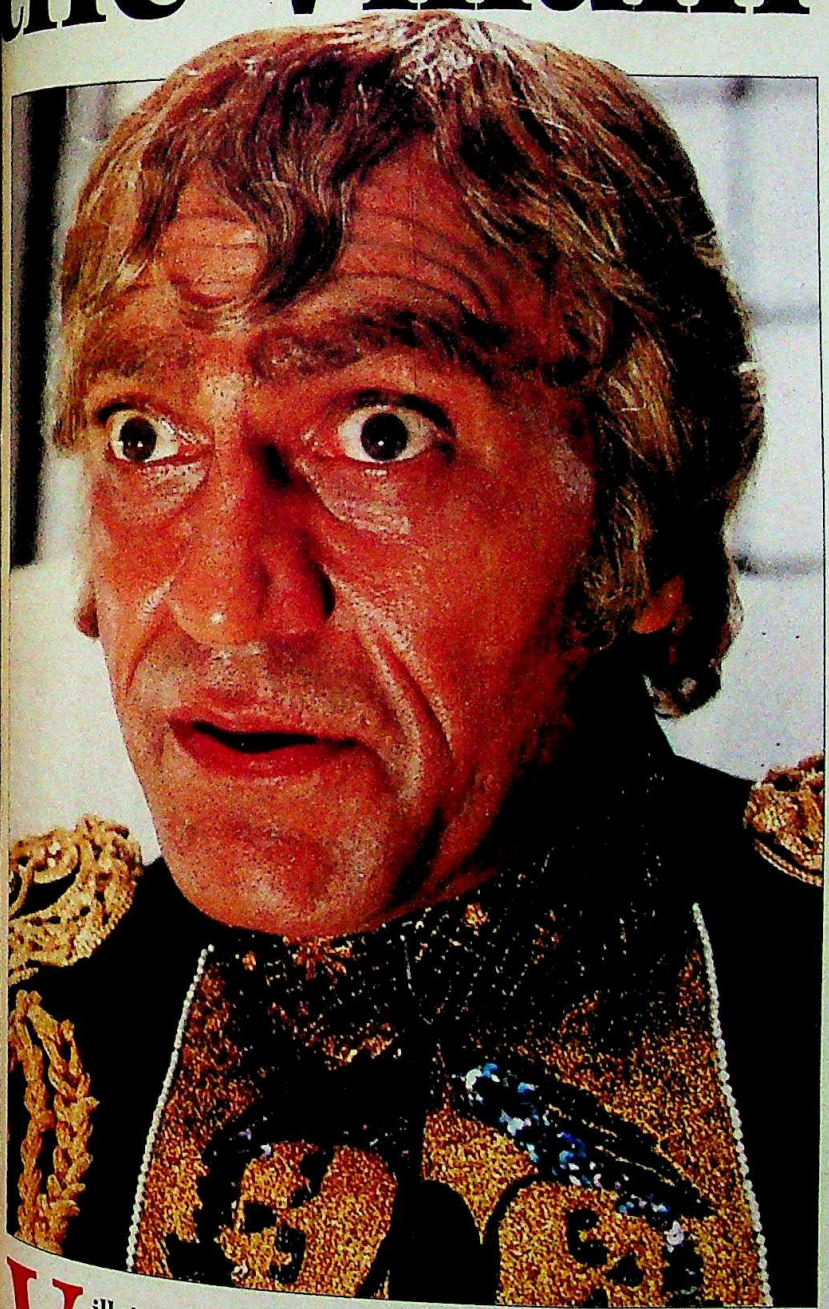
othe Villain



Villains personify power. They make things happen faster. Not only do they get the money, they also get the girls—at least until that fateful last reel. They have the big cars, the fancy clothes. The bad guys often get the best lines too—and the front-row whistles.

don't hate villains anymore," says Javed Akhtar, the creator of the immortal Gabbar Singh and Mogambo. "They are fascinated by the innocence of his cruelty. When I went to the zoo as a child, it was the lion I wanted to see."

The princes of darkness have taken over. They are—in this nation of Walter Mittys—the new conduits for escape from hum-drum life. The villain is the new hero, the new role-model, the new pin-up.

Until this decade there were only two or three villains to shed some darkness in tinseltown. Today, there are well over a dirty dozen. Multi-pack villainy entered the scene when heroes began to come in threes and fours. The demand for villains started in the '70s according to Pran. "Earlier we had one hero, two heroines and one villain. Now there are three heroes, three heroines and at least four villains." Elaborates Gulshan Grover: "So many villains are needed because you need to kill off a villain every three or four reels to keep the excitement going."

The villains are also on 24-hour call because this is the age of the action film. Just look at the titles: *Paap Ko Jala Kar Raakh Kar Doonga, Gunahon Ka Faisla, Aazmakar Dekho, Elaan-e-Jung*. Publicity for the last boasts of 200 fighters.

Right on top of the pantheon of villains with his granite, Mount Rushmore face ("People just see evil in my face") is Amrish Puri. India's best evil emissary—who millions in the world loved to hate when he played the human sacrificing priest in Stephen Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. Hollywood still beckons—he is always being asked to play Red Indian chiefs. Says Puri: "In Satyug it was Ravana, in Kalyug it's me."

The pantheon is getting crowded: Shakti Kapoor (262 films down, 40 on hand), Gulshan Grover (50 films old, 50 signed), the evergreen Prem Chopra (200 and going strong). The relatively new entrants, Sadashiv Amrapurkar and Paresh Rawal, have between them signed over a hundred films; 20 of Amrapurkar's films will be released within a few months. Paresh has completed over a dozen.

Even the "good" guys want to be villains. Anupam Kher catapulted to the six-figure income when he defected to the Bad Guys. Pran, who reigned supreme for two decades before he made the switch over after *Upkar*, is back to being bad. And rich again. Danny, the exotic villain, played exclusive and signed just a few films a year. Now, he's on a signing spree; vil-

Amrish Puri as Mogambo in *Mr India*: the Shahenshah of villainy

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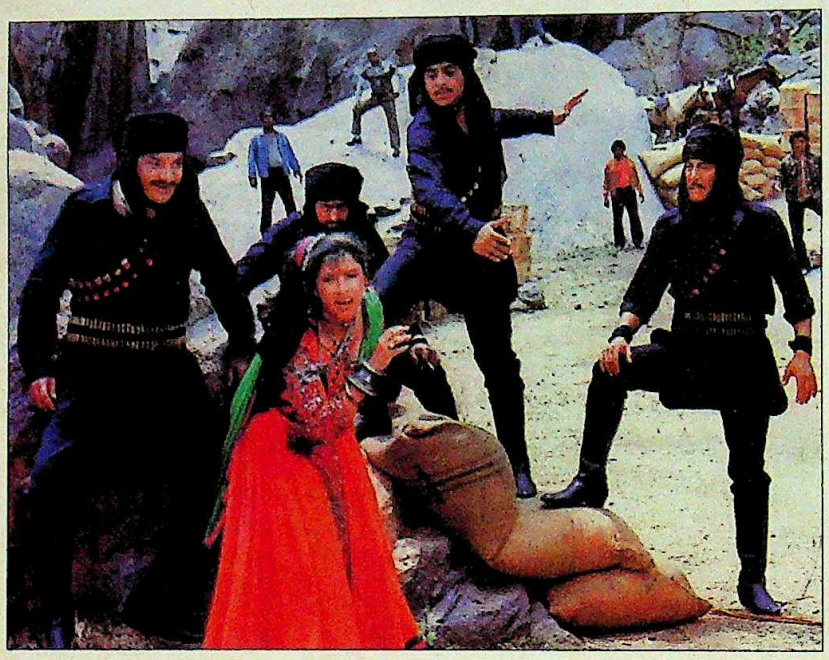
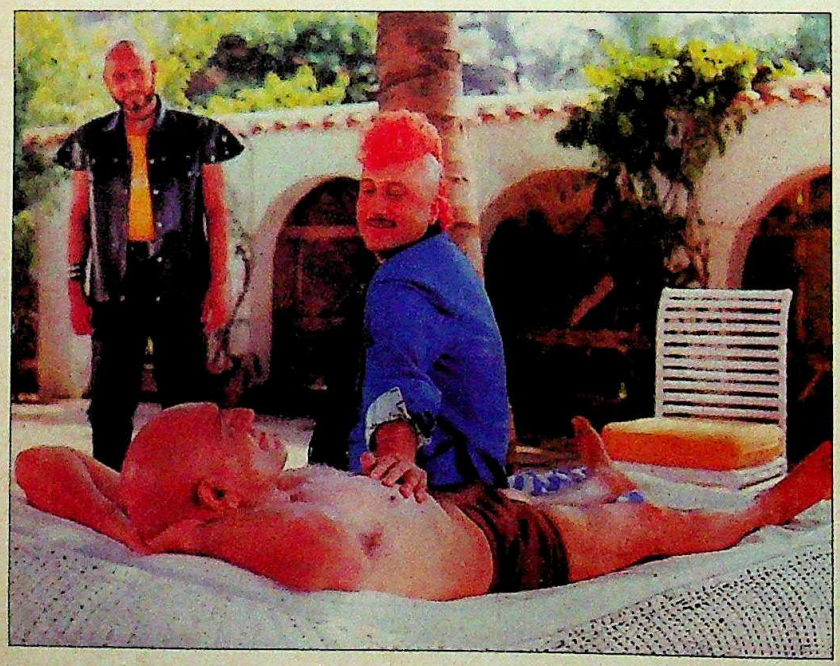
Till this decade there were only two or three villains to shed darkness in tinseltown. Today, there are well over a dirty dozen. They get paid better than their predecessors and have a large female fan following.





Indian cinema has broken another taboo and introduced the gay villain. In *Mast Kalander*, Anupam Kher plays an effeminate baddie who frequently dons a powder pink wig—the homosexual overtones are clear.

lainy is competitive business.

The heroes too are taking the plunge. Kiran Kumar who did not initially follow his father, Jeevan (all those evil zamindars and uncles) languished as a hero but is now thriving as the Handsome Villain. The pot of gold at the end of villainy's rainbow seems bottomless. And the villains get paid better.

Amrish Puri, on that last lonely rung on top, is said to be worth Rs 10 lakh a picture. Pran and Prem Chopra get hefty amounts too. The middle rung: the Anupam Khers, Shakti Kapoors, Gulshan Grovers, charge Rs 4 lakh to Rs 6 lakh per film. Towards the bottom: Rs 1 lakh or 2 lakh. Villains are the most bleary-eyed on the sets as many are on three shifts; even four. No self-respecting villain would have less than 30 films on his platter.

The K.N. Singh, Pran and Ajit stereotypes are gone. In the '40s, there were only two sorts of villains: the first was the westernised young stud, England-returned. He went to the club, ate meat, and a bottle of VAT 69 was always at hand. He arrived at the airport wearing a felt hat, a camera round his neck, turned to his father and said: "Hello daddy." The killing line about him was *"Ab to woh club bhi jaane lagen hain."* (Now he has even started going to the club). The second was the zamindar—the exploiter, played to perfection by Tiwari and Jeevan, twisting their long moustaches and raising one cruel eyebrow at the village belles.

These images have now become obsolete and villainy today wears myriad faces. Explains director Saeed Mirza: "We need a battery of villains to represent the total ills of the country. There is corruption, power, sadism. We need rapists, drug-pushers, terrorists."

The Dream Factory obliges. So Amrish Puri in N.N. Sippy's forthcoming *Aag se Khelenge* sells arms to terrorists and brown sugar to India's young. In Ramesh Sippy's *Bhrashtachar*, a khadi-clad Anupam Kher does the crooked politician number, while Vinod Nagpal plays the crooked businessman and politician-maker.

In Kewal Sharma's *Paap ki Kamayee*, the veteran baddie with the lecherous leer, Prem Chopra, along with Gulshan Grover, Shafi Inamdar and Raza Murad (all in blinding detergent commercial white, down to the shoes) is striking a deal to buy File Z with the nation's defence secrets from Puneet Issar (in a Star Trek suit) in a seedy beach-side Juhu hotel.

Dimple with the villainous four in *Gunahon ka Faisla* (top left) and a scene from *Mast Kalander*: gay time for villains

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From the sinister bogey man, the villain is becoming the Pied Piper—luring children to consumer land. The biscuit which is Gabbar Singh's *asli pasand* in the advertisement has become everybody's real favourite.

Heroines are also jumping on to the villains' bandwagon. Big stars like Rekha and Dimple want to be bad; they want to brandish guns, take revenge and rough up half-a-dozen muscled guys.

Underworld dons, gun-runners and terrorists are hot favourites. Followed by the Gandhi-capped politician-villain, who has virtually become a caricature. His standard line is: *"Hum samaj sevak hain."* Whenever Sadashiv Amrapurkar—who immortalised the breed as Rama Shetty in *Aardh Satya* and also dons a political uniform in *Akhri Rasta* and *Hukumat*—appears as a *neta*, the audience knows the baddie has arrived.

RASPUTIN-like godmen have also made their debut. These characters, who hold politicians in their palms, have been borrowed from real-life godmen—Dhirendra Brahmachari and Chandra Swami *et al*. They are increasingly inspiring script-writers, both in small budget films like *Paap ki Saza*, just canned, and block-busters like Ramesh Sippy's *Bhrashtachar*.

Secure on the best-seller list is the National Disintegrator: the villain with the faintly foreign connection who wants to break India into pieces. *"Yeh mulk ko cheer kar denge. Ek tang Pakistan me, dusri tang..."* (We will rip this nation apart. One leg in Pakistan, the other...) says Anupam Kher in the forthcoming *Insaniyat*. This public enemy number one either supplies guns and missiles to terrorists or sets about imploding India from within by attempting to hook the entire youth of the nation on to drugs. The same film also has lines like: *"Hum Hindustan me Hindu aur Musalman ko larayenge"* (We will make the Hindus and Muslims in India fight) delivered with a farcical, imitation English accent by a blonde Tom Alter.

The Good then has taken a back seat in Indian cinema. Unfortunately, this trading of places reflects more fundamental and disturbing changes.

We are going through the multi-rape phase in the multi-villain film: each villain "gets" to rape at least once. That fight-masters now direct the numerous rape scenes reveals how de-humanised and banal rape has become. Earlier, the closed fist of the woman would open and the audience knew she had been raped. The camera would cut to the villain—and the diabolical laugh of a Jeevan or Pran would be heard. Today the laugh remains, but nothing is left to the imagination.

The trend is all the more obscene in a country where gang rape is becoming increasingly common—where the guardians of the people, policemen, brutally

Amjad Khan as Gabbar Singh in *Sholay* (top right); and Rekha in *Khoon Bhari Maang*: revenge in feminine gender

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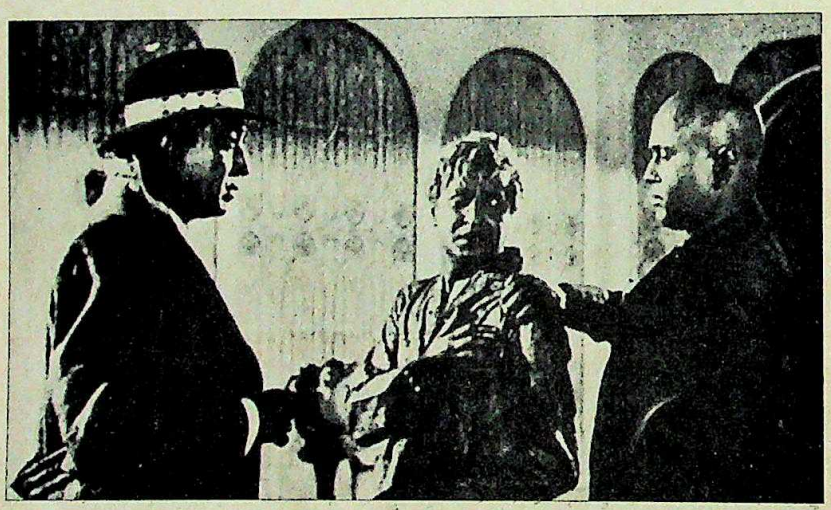
rampage villages and rape women.

Today, the screen rapists have a large female following and even boast about the number of rapes they have "notched", without batting an eye. So inured has society become to brutality that Gulshan Grover can boast: "Raping is my business." College girls beseige him. "Earlier even heroines thought it was not prestigious to have an affair with the villain. Now I come across college girls who want an association. They know that I am no goody-goody. I mean business."

So does the nasty-eyed Shakti Kapoor. He now romances the heroine: he is the dancing villain; he sings too. And he gets bags-full of gushy fan mail. Anupam Kher, who was chillingly real as Dr Dang, the soft-spoken terrorist boss who wants to break India into pieces in *Karma*, gets letters addressing him as "*Mere, pyare, pyare* Dr Dang" (My dear, dear Dr Dang). A lady from Assam sent him 55 letters; she keeps his photograph under her pillow.

Why the change of heart? Once upon an unevil time one looked for villains on screen. Today, they crowd the newspapers and the neighbourhood. Evil, alas, has become ordinary, banal. Good and evil are mixed up; the boundaries between the two have blurred. As they have between the hero and the villain. Says Javed Akhtar: "Today it is difficult to say who is a hero and who is a villain. In 1971 the smuggler was the villain. Four years later he had become the hero."



A villain on screen was thought to be one off it too. For the 25 years Pran ruled the screen, nobody named their sons Pran. When Prem Chopra stepped out, people said, "Hide your wives, Prem Chopra is coming."

It is a reflection of changing morality that evil has lost its sting. Society has a code of morals which reflects the aspirations of people. Screen writers, explains Javed Akhtar, personify those aspirations in the hero and the opposite in the villain. The code changes with time, and with it the position of the villain in society. "Today the villain as individual is obsolete. Villainy is big business, big money and political forces: the establishment," says Amjad Khan, one of Hindi cinema's most memorable bad guys.

Real life villains are now coveted; they become the celebrities at parties, they are the men behind all the big projects. In a society-on-the-make it matters not how you make it but that you make it. And make it big and rich. "Do we stop going to cocktail parties because a certain guy there has killed so many people?" asks producer Suresh Jindal. "The guy wears Gucci shoes, has a Cartier pen and has pictures taken with the prime minister. They are the glitterati of the day."

Popular cinema holds a mirror to life. As the student cadets pursuing Amrish Puri are well aware. "I like villains," says A. Mishra, "because they bring out the true picture of society. All else is fictional. I can't identify with those heroes singing painfully to the heroines."

No wonder, then, that the anti-hero persona survives in *Dayavan* in which Vinod Khanna plays the underworld don. In fact, Khanna entered films as a villain. So did Shatrughan Sinha and Tamil superstar Rajnikant.

Villains are the trend-setters. For the silver jubilee of *Pratighaat*—in which the politician-goonda, Kali, represents the most raw and real portrayal of the phenomenon—distributors from north Indian towns came dressed in Kali gear. "Many of them came with long silk scarves which flowed to their ankles," says the film's director N. Chandra.

Not that the heroes have faded out. But they have become lustreless. All good work does make Jack a dull boy. The villain, on the other hand, has a gaudy but mesmerising glitter about him. The audience is beginning to live through its villains. Ramesh Sippy attributes their current popularity to the fact that despite our notion of good and evil, secretly, all of us find them more "fascinating because they do what everyone wants to do at least once in a while. The audience has a trip on this". Javed Akhtar agrees: "People admire a character like Mogambo because

Scenes from *An Evening in Paris* (top) and *Apraadh*: the good bad times

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he has total confidence in himself. He has perfection, even if it is of evil. We are all fascinated by evil."

Most of all, villains personify power. The plot unfolds according to their dictates until that fateful last reel. "The poor hero has to struggle for happiness. But the villain makes things happen faster. He can fire a gun and be rich in two seconds. Thus the villain becomes the hero," explains script-writer K.K. Shukla.

Not only does the villain get the money, he also gets the girl—at least until judgement day. "In the modern age who wants to be a Ram and wait for his wife. Ravana sees Sita and decides that he has to have her. He is not scared. He feels supreme," adds Shukla.

Nor is the bad guy—often a comic-book character—frightening anymore. The emotion he evokes is envy—for those mirrored walls, star ships, disco dens, his mile-long desk, strobe-lit floor and outlandish outfits.

THE villains' wardrobe defies the imagination—and description. Shark skin costumes, glittering suits weighed down with gold *zari* and fake stones if not metal plating, tall, midnight cowboy boots, Rayban glasses (the assassins' speciality), leather with cut-away Spartacus sleeves, and sci-fi outfits ("get-up" is the word in villainland).

The actors love it. Says Anupam Kher: "I love wearing jewellery. It makes me feel terrific. As a kid I would put a bed-cover over my shoulders and feel like I was Tughlak." The get-ups are often as effective as the wand of Cinderella's fairy godmother: Anupam Kher as the snakeman in *Nigahen* looks stunningly evil in the black and saffron gear highlighted by a flowing wig.

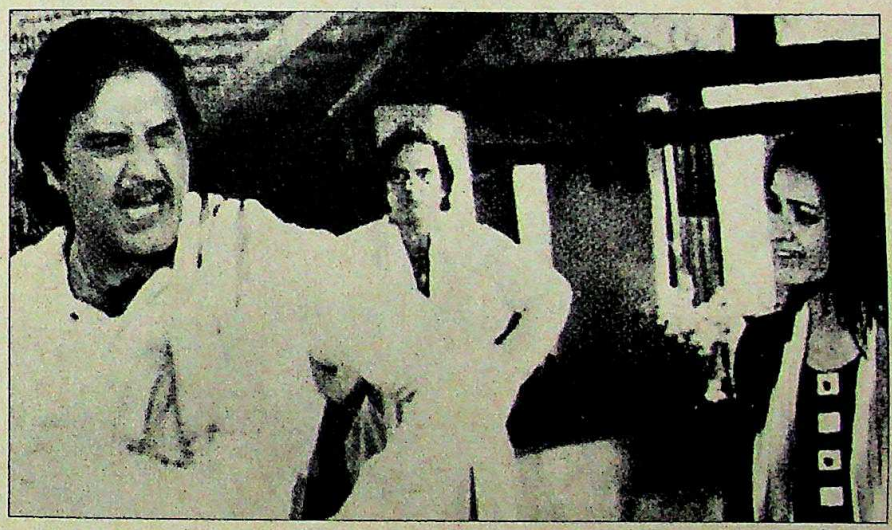
No wonder, even the heroes want to play the baddies. Anil Kapoor certainly does. "I will ultimately have to play a villain. Negative roles are more popular with the masses."

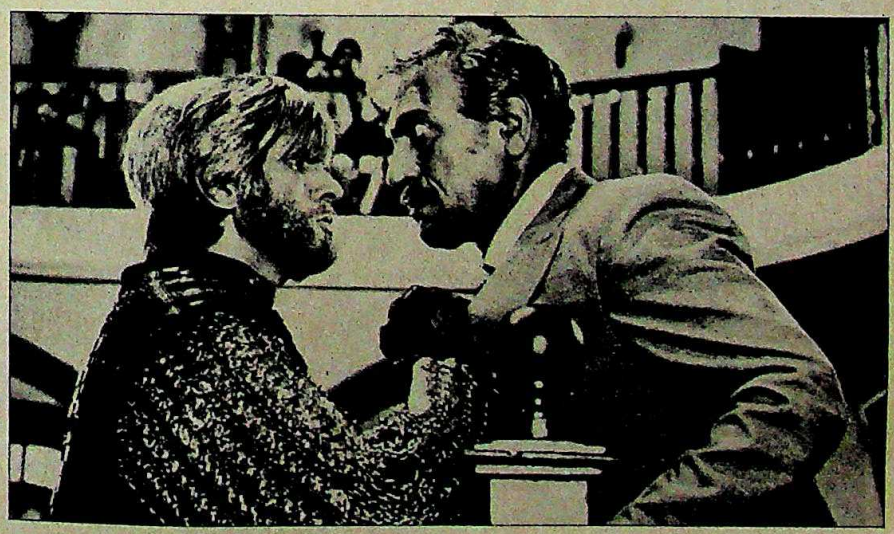
This is largely due to the fact that villains often get the best lines. And the front row whistles. Gabbar Singh mouthed the most memorable dialogue—*"Are oh Samba"* (Oh, Samba) and *"Ab to Kalia tera kya hoga"* (Now, Kalia, what will happen to you?)—a favourite line of north Indian policemen. When Amitabh Bachchan and Sanjeev Kumar read the script of *Sholay*, both wanted to play Gabbar Singh because of his deadly one-liners. Kamal Hasan in *Nayakan* walked away with a national award for his brilliant portrayal of an underworld don.

Who can forget the smarmy arch-villain Ajit, usually cavorting in his heart-shaped bed with blonde dolls, saying: *"Is ko Hamlet poison dedo. To be se not to be ho jayega."* (Give him Hamlet poison. From to be he will become not-to-be). And Ajit again: *"Issko liquid oxygen me dubaado. Liquid isse jeenay nahin dega, or oxygen issay marnay nahin dega."* (Drown him in liquid oxygen. The liquid will not let him to live; oxygen will not let him die). Prem Chopra, still keeps getting asked to repeat: *"Mera naam hai Prem, Prem Chopra."* (My name is Prem, Prem Chopra). His favourite line is: *"Main woh bala hoon jo pathar ko kanch se torta hoon."* (I am that power that breaks a stone with a piece of glass.)

The lines are as roaringly good today. Sadashiv Amrapurkar in *Paap Ko Jala Kar Rakh Kar Doonga* threatens Dharmendra: *"Hum woh nag hain jinka dasa hua kabhi pani nahin mangta"* (I am that snake whose victim will not even ask for water.)

One reason why villains are getting better is because there is more talent available. Actors from theatre have joined the baddie bandwagon. Amrish Puri, a former employee of the Ministry of Labour in Bombay, has about 50 plays and a solid theatrical reputation behind him. Anupam Kher is from the National School of Drama. Sadashiv Amrapurkar is from Marathi theatre. Paresh Rawal comes from Gujarati and Hindi theatre. Vinod





Good and evil are mixed up; the boundaries between the two have blurred over the last few years. As they have between the hero and the villain. Today it is difficult to say who is a hero and who is a villain.

Vinod Khanna in *Dayavan* (top); and Amitabh as *Shahenshah*: the anti-heroes

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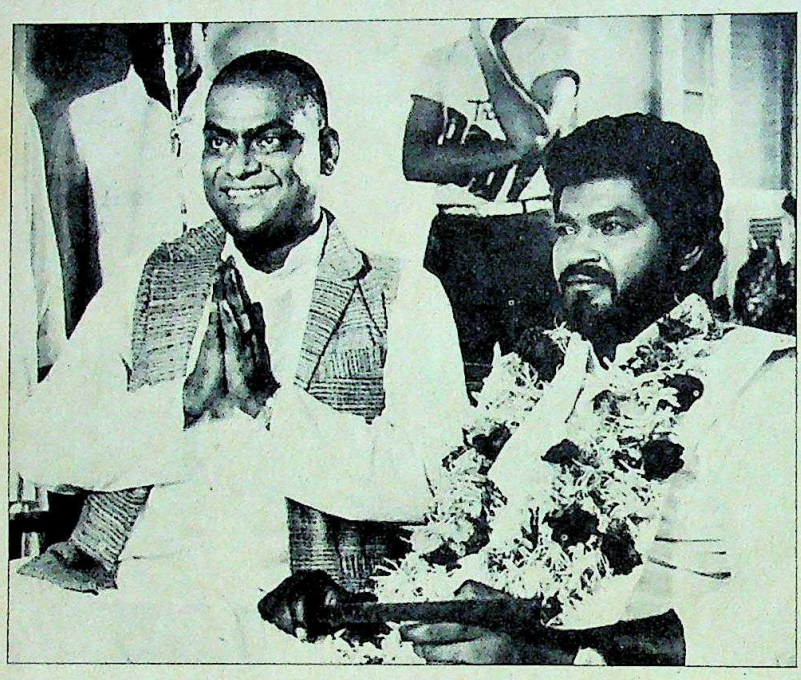
Once upon an unevil time one looked for villains on screen. Today, they crowd the newspapers and the neighbourhood—Gandhi-capped politicians, underworld dons, terrorists and God-men.



Fight-masters now direct rape scenes, dehumanising them further. Each villain gets to rape at least once in most films, and a measure of his success is the number of rapes he has notched up in his career.

Charan Raj who plays Kali a political villain in *Pratighaat* (below left); and Grover in the inevitable rape scene

Nagpal, the small screen's marathon villain (Shyamlal in *Buniyaad)* with a theatre background has also switched to the big screen. They don't need the loud gestures and gimmicky vaudeville mannerisms of their predecessors. Villains, as producer-director Amit Khanna explains, are now "required to act. How much more smart-alecky villainy with expensive gadgets, cars, motor boat chases can you have? "

The new lot are certainly more professional. Says director Subhash Ghai: "The younger generation of villains are all good actors. On the contrary, there are weaker actors in the new series of heroes." Paresh Rawal, who gave a powerful performance in *Dacait*, is a happy villain: "Villains are now given a cause. The trend is to make them more human. To show what makes him do what he does."

To add to the empathy with the audience, screen writers weave quirky traits into their characters. Anupam Kher as 'DDN' in *Ladaai* loves to play chess. But he hates to lose. He even hates the word lose. So when his opponent wins and says so, 'DDN' kills him without upsetting the chess board. "I fit this phase of the cool, relaxed, smiling villain," says Kher. "The villain was supposed to look ugly. Now the smile is what you remember."

More villains now hold their own against the hero. This change came about during Amitabh Bachchan's one-man industry phase when a puny villain would just not do. Amrish Puri, for one, can match Bachchan, eye to eye, voice to voice. "For the first time a sense of evil has been created with a voice," says director Govind Nihalani.

It is the versatility of the new villains that has expanded the Evil Empire. They have even started edging out the comedians. Kadar Khan has taken comic-villainy as far as it can go. Perhaps a laugh too far. The villain-cum-dialogue-writer has written himself some funnily evil lines. In a string of made-in-Madras films from *Himmatwallah* to *Tohfa*, Khan and Shakti Kapoor in a father-son act, lightened their wickedness with comedy, replete with sexual overtones and slapstick humour.

With variety as the new spice of villainy, it was inevitable that Indian cinema would break another taboo and introduce the gay villain. Anupam Kher

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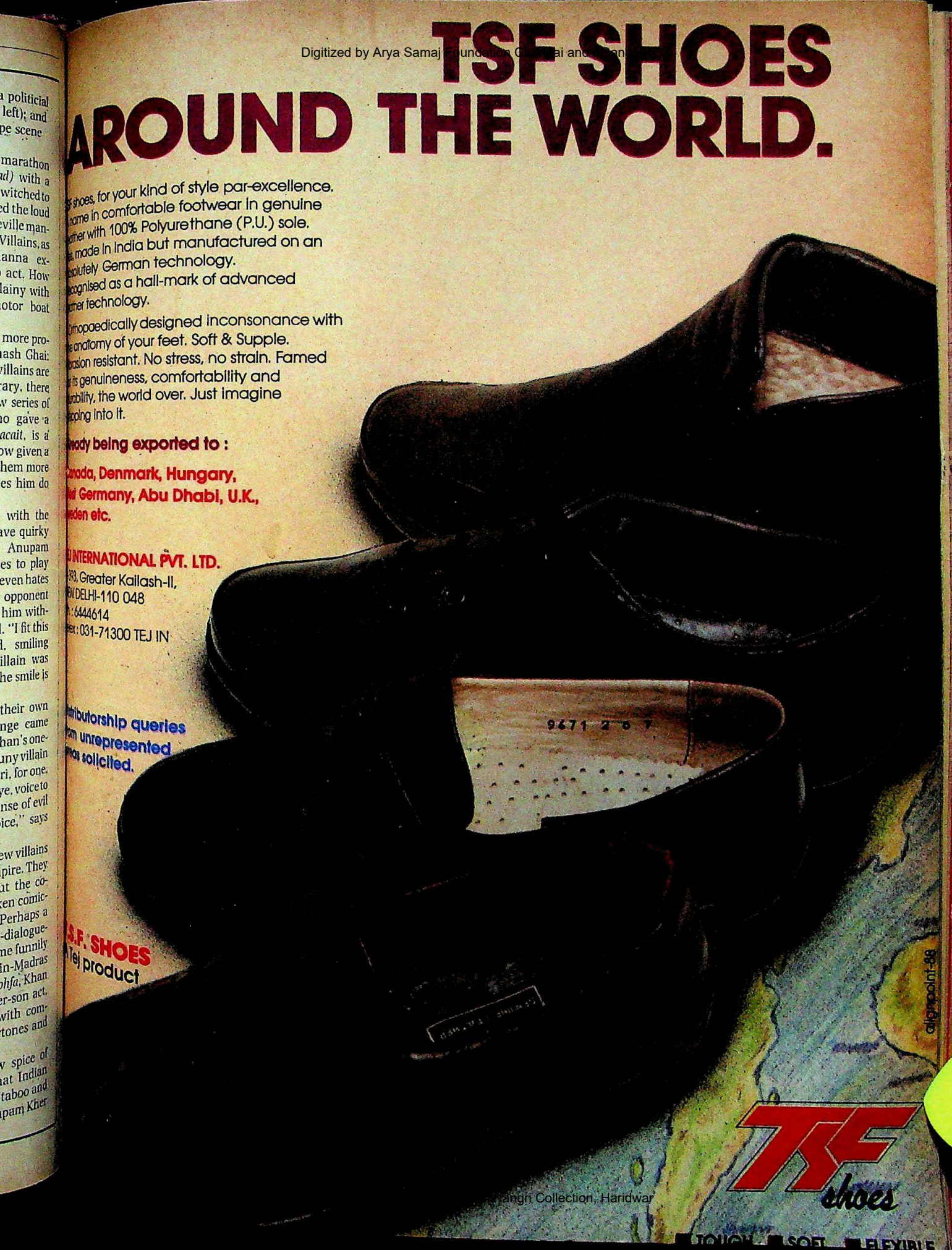

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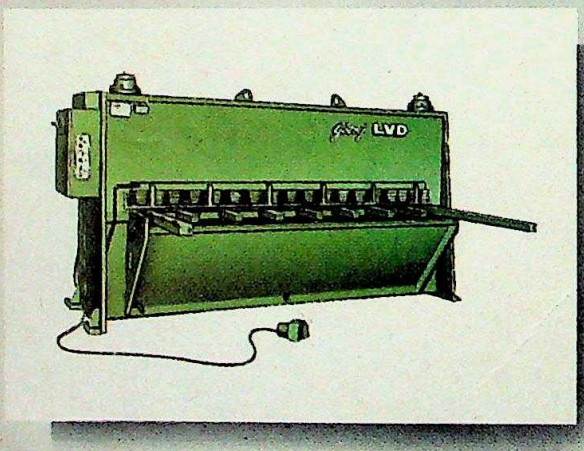

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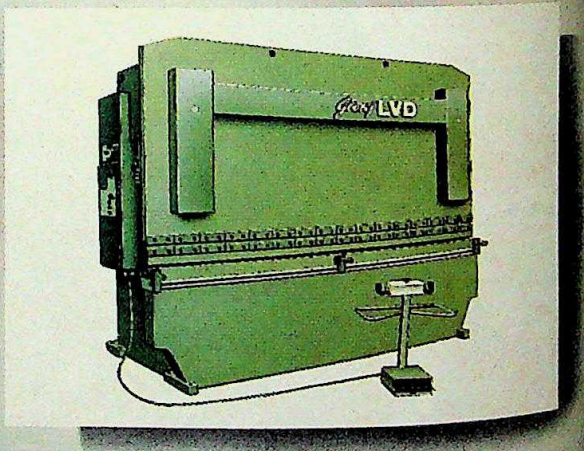

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plays a bald homosexual baddie—often clad in a powder puff pink wig—in *Mast Kalander*. On the whole, however, the trend seems to favour the more sadistic and sinister bad guy. The Prem Chopra leer or the menacing Pran smile and that evil Kathakali expression have, in some instances, degenerated into psychotic villains with unbelievably inane expressions. In *Zakhmi Aurat*, Tej Sapru and some of the other rapists—one of whom keeps putting his finger in his mouth and giggling—would even make the devil flinch with embarrassment.

Heroines too are jumping on to the bandwagon. Says Dimple Kapadia: "I'd love to be a woman villain and wear a James Bond tuxedo with a gun in the hand and fight five muscled guys." Even Rekha wants to be bad. In Deepak Shivdasani's film *Madame X*, she plays a woman who is obsessed with gold. Says Shivdasani: "Usually films have one Ram, one Ravana and Sita and the variations. Now I have Rekha as Ravana; she was keen on playing a negative character. The other Rekha (it's a double role) is Sita and Ram is Mohsin Khan." One dialogue from the film: "*Hum hain mot ke woh express, duniya jise kahti hai Madame X.*" (I am the express of death that the world knows as Madame X). Who wouldn't want to be bad with lines like this?

Inevitably, between the anti-hero and the heroic villain, vamps have died

MADHAV THE TAILOR

Dressed to Kill

THE voice over the phone was a touch irritable. "I am busy now. There are many *netas* sitting here." Why politicians? Weren't his clients villains from Hindi films? "Yes, yes, I specialise in *netas* and *abhinetas*."

Madhav, the dress maker, is a busy man indeed. Villains have been his speciality (heroes bore him) ever since he opened shop 10 years ago. But it is with the recent invasion of baddies on screen—and their raised status in tinsel town—that "villains" are really queuing up at his door.

And politicians, too. For the last decade (*Inquilab*, *Aaj Ka MLA*, and now *Pratighaat*) politicians have proved saleable and endurable screen villains. And it is their screen clothes—natty khadi and shimmering raw silk (hand spun)—that has lured the Mantralaya *mantris*. Madhav sees nothing extraordinary about his twin clientele. "Both villains and politicians want to look different from the rest of the world. Politicians always tell me: "Give us something *alag* (exclusive) even if it is for pyjama kurtas. Today, there are so many films made on politics that I created a special raw silk effect for it. Politicians too like this. I also make special cream Khadi pants and pyjamas for them." His fame has obviously crossed the border: the late General Zia sent a request and his measurements for a sherwani. Madhav did not oblige.

The special place in his heart is reserved for villains. Blinding black suits with what appears to be all the *zari* in the world crowd out the *neta*-chic khadi suits. Quilted satin jackets, strangely cut and padded outfits—all to make the villain larger-than-life—dazzle the eye. Madhav loves doing villain clothes because he can completely unfetter his imagination. "What will a hero wear: at the most a suit or a safari suit. The villain is usually rich. So I can really be creative."

Villainy is certainly a very serious matter for him. Recently, he went all the way to Bangkok to buy the black stretch material and all those buckles for the fantastic costume (Rs 20,000 with a "duplicate for the double") for Amrish Puri in N.N. Sippy's new film, *Aag Se Khelenge*.

His *chef d'oeuvre*, however, has been Mogambo (Rs 21,000), created a few years ago. This outfit has a bit of history to it, literally. Madhav often studies history books for inspiration. He cried eureka when he saw Mountbatten's epaulettes. Mogambo had to have them.

Variety being the spice of villainy, Madhav today can move in time on his clothes machine–backwards (angry Maratha kings) and forwards (*Star Trek* creatures). His talents are not confined to the cutting board. He is also a painter: "Had I not become a tailor, I would have become a painter." So, he sizes up the villain in question and paints his mind's picture. Then proudly keeps the portraits.

And the paint is unlikely to run out in a hurry. Today, clothes make the villain. And Madhav remains the master of villainous *haute couture*.

Madhav and his villainous creations

Madhav's creations for politician-villains proved so popular that real *netas* now queue up at his door. The late General Zia sent his measurements for a sherwani. Madhav did not oblige.

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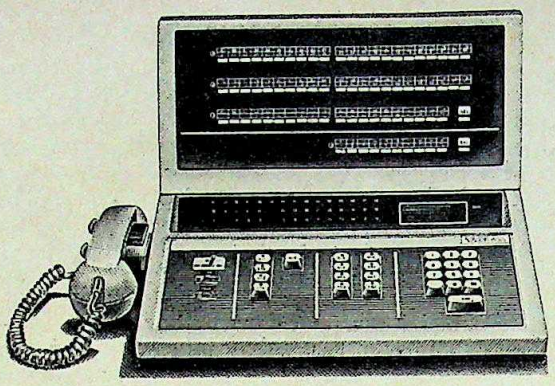

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The vamps have died an unnatural death. The Bindus and Helens, with those marvellous dancing eyebrows and wicked ways, have sunk without a trace. The new breed of heroines has upstaged them.

In the old films, sex only happened on a rainy night, followed by marriage in a deserted temple. Today's heroine sleeps around, smokes, drinks, does all that the vamp did—and still gets to marry the hero.

(Clockwise from far left) Bindu and Helen; Dimple and Rekha: with heroines like these who needs vamps?

an unnatural death. The Bindus, Helens Nadiras, and Shashikalas with those marvellous dancing eyebrows, cigarette holders and their truly wicked ways, have sunk without a trace. It is the new breed of heroines who struck the fatal blow—they do all that the vamp did and still get to marry the hero. The real change came when heroines also began to come in threes and fours. As all of them have to do something—one plays the Sita role; the other sings and does the naughty, revealing numbers; the third puts up her fists and fights.

Zeenat Aman with her short hair and naughty-but-nice manner set the trend. In *Deewar*, Parveen Babi picked it up—in the film the hero and the heroine actually sleep together, something that would happen earlier only on a rainy night. It was always followed by guilt and marriage in a deserted temple, as happened in *Aradhana*.

In the later-day *Trishul*, Waheeda Rahman has a son out of wedlock, with no pretence of marriage. And in today's love stories, it is almost natural to show the boy and girl living together. Laments Amjad Khan: "I am now surprised to see those films in which the ladies actually wore clothes and ran around trees. Now they are dropping them as fast as autumn leaves."

The more things change, the more they remain the same. Ram has changed, Sita has changed, and so has Ravana. But Ravana still fascinates.

The scene: the *mahurat* of Sawan Kumar Tak's film, *Dussehra*. Heroes Jackie Shroff and Jeetendra stalk the stage and strike Jimmy Dean poses. Rekha follows and out Jimmy Deans them with her magnificent pout. But then along comes Amrish Puri, in a black and gold-rimmed hat to stare menacingly at the audience, while the loudspeakers blare sulphorous laughter. "I am corruption, I am bribery... I am the *shaitan*... and if you want to know who I really am, just look."

He turns. The red curtain opens to reveal a 30-foot effigy of a modern day Ravana. He is dressed like Puri and has his face. He also has two glowing red, electric eyes. Below him the cardboard city of Bombay is all afire. The arch-villain is riding high—his day has arrived.

—MADHU JAIN in Bombay

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Ombudsman for the Times

THE Times of India has upstaged the debate on the unlamented Defamation Bill, consigned to the archives for the present. Indeed, the most significant outcome of the elaborate celebrations of the *The Times*' 150 years was the announcement by the owner of the parent company, Ashok Jain, that he would institute the system of ombudsman in his newspaper.

It represents a first in India and is a measure to be welcomed.

An ombudsman, a Swedish innovation, is an official appointed to investigate individuals' complaints against public authorities. An ombudsman in Swedish means, a legal representative.

But the institution of ombudsman in its newspaper *avatar* has flowered in the US with newspapers like *The Washington Post* taking their ombudsmen very seriously. They can question editorial decisions and give their own independent conclusions. And the newspapers have been none the worse for it. In fact, an ombudsman instills confidence in a newspaper's fairness and builds a healthy, and profitable, rapport with the reader.

There are, of course, obvious dangers in creating such a system, which will stand or fall on the strength of the person who wears the crown of thorns. Regrettably, the legal colour sought to be given to the ombudsman in *The Times* concept will take us along a barren path.

Eminent jurists have an eminent place in Indian society, but not an ombudsman on newspapers. The bane of Indian society is our litigiousness, one reason why our courts are clogged. An ombudsman does not need legal training but a fair mind and intimate knowledge and extensive experience of how newspapers function. Producing a good newspaper is an extremely difficult and complex operation, which cannot be learnt overnight, and an ombudsman cannot really do justice to his job if he does not know how mistakes occur inadvertently or otherwise.

One danger is that a vain or less than fair ombudsman could well become a thorn in the editor's flesh and bring utter confusion to a newspaper. There certainly cannot be two editors running a newspaper. At the same time, the concept of the ombudsman will require self-confidence and maturity in the editor to take valid criticism in his stride

SATURDAY TIMES

THE TIMES OF INDIA

PM asks press to draw limits on its freedom

'The Times of India One Hundred Fifty'

It is not the job of the press to please Authority, but it owes it to itself to be fair in presenting news even as it remains, and should remain, trenchant in its comments.

and not construe it as an attack on his freedom.

Ashok Jain is conscious of these pitfalls. He has made it clear that the ombudsman would "not in any way impose any restriction on editorial freedom". The editor would be "the first ombudsman", but when readers were not satisfied and there were undue delays, they could approach the ombudsman.

A good ombudsman could provide quick redressal of grievances, whether they concern defamation or other matters. Obviously, such redressal will be available only in newspapers having ombudsmen. But it is a beginning, and if the institution succeeds in *The Times*, it can catch on like wild fire.

The Government cannot welcome the institution of ombudsman because if unfair pressure has been exercised on a newspaper, he can question it and give his comments independently. Obviously, the value of the ombudsman will depend upon the freedom he is given to exercise his independent judgement. To that extent, it is a self-denying dispensation on the owner's part.

Whether one agrees with the press' adverse relationship with the Government or not—the Janata government had objected to it during its short stint in office—the relationship is a delicate one. As Rajiv Gandhi's innumerable statements indicate, the Government remains dissatisfied.

It is not the job of the press to please Authority, but it owes it to itself to be fair in presenting news even as it remains, and should remain, trenchant in its comments. A restricted or docile press, as Indira Gandhi discovered during and after the Emergency, can be of no help to the Government or the country, however pleasing its dulcet notes sound to Authority's ears.

Regrettably, for the Government, the press has become a football to kick around in the election campaign. There can be no real dialogue between the press and the Government when Rajiv Gandhi distinguishes himself by such statements as the one he made at the concluding session of the All India Congress(I) Committee in New Delhi.

Presumably wearing the Congress(I) president's hat, Rajiv said: "Let the newspapers and magazines write what they feel. After a span of 20 or 25 years they will write what we are saying now." The press can return the compliment.

The Times of India bears great responsibility in launching the institution of the ombudsman in our country. One would hope that it will move away from the idea of a jurist occupying the chair. For the present, we can say two cheers for *The Times*.

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Political Nostalgia

Benazir perpetuates enigma of Bhuttoism

BENAZIR BHUTTO
Daughter of the East: An autobiography
Hamish Hamilton
Price: £12.95; Pages: 333

LET me begin with an admission. I know Benazir, I like her and I hope she wins the coming elections. Whatever you may think of her politics, her public statements or her style, she has shown courage and commitment. And her autobiography is testament to these qualities. Yet though interesting, and often as gripping as a thriller, it does not do her complete justice. Both in terms of what it covers and what it omits this is an inadequate substitute. The real Benazir is more rewarding.

The book does not pretend to be a conventional autobiography. As she writes: "This is my story; events as I saw them, felt them, reacted to them." But it is also a political record and interpretation of Pakistan's past. "It is important that the world remember the repression we in Pakistan have had to bear following General Zia's coup d'etat."

The problem with history as the Bhuttos see it, is the blind spots. It is either dressed-up to suit their purposes or abridged to avoid the embarrassments. Indeed, Benazir is perhaps more forthright than others might have been. Yet, whilst her circumlocution around Bangladesh, Al-Zulfikar and the PNA is understandable, if unfortunate, her silence about her struggle to change the PPP or Oxford's refusal, when she was an undergraduate there, to award her father an honorary doctorate is less explicable. The party reform was by no means indefensible and Oxford's refusal was.

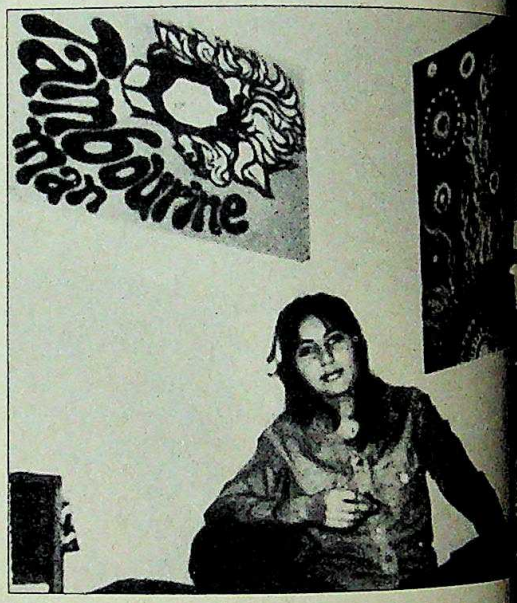
Perhaps as perplexing is the fact that issues too are not really considered. Today, poised at the precipice of power Benazir has little time for the luxury of relaxed reflection. Instead, she has to tackle the yawning challenge of governing Pakistan. But these memoirs were written with plenty of time and reason to think about the broad questions. Why, for instance, has democracy failed to find roots in Pakistan? Why did Zia's rule last 11 years and only end with his death, if then? And just what is the role and utility of 'dynasty' in South Asia's democracies? Benazir is uniquely placed to address these issues. She certainly has strong views about them. What a shame she did not include them in her book (or, perhaps, what a pity her editor—ghost writer?—did not permit her to).

As a result these memoirs reveal little of Benazir's astutely remoulded politics. She no longer presides over an overtly socialist party. Social democracy is its new theme. The bugbears of her father's rule, nationalisation and land reform, have been eschewed. She is warmer to America, friendlier towards India. She no longer criticises the army. Restraint, a certain lightness of touch and a greater political agility characterise her new style. It is what has made her acceptable to many who still feel a visceral hatred for her father. Yet it was all achieved in the teeth of stiff opposition from her 'uncles', the politicians of her father's generation who were reluctant to accept her leadership whilst only grudgingly acknowledging the fact that they needed her for her charisma.

Where the book is more fulsome is about her personally. It opens with a harrowing account of her father's hanging: "They killed my father in the early morning hours of April 4, 1979, inside Rawalpindi Central Jail. Imprisoned with my mother a few miles away in a deserted police training camp at Sihala, I felt the moment of my father's death. Despite the Valiums my mother had given me to try and get through the agonising night, I suddenly sat bolt-upright in bed at 2.00 a.m. 'No!' the scream burst through the knots in my throat. 'No!' I couldn't breathe, didn't want to breathe. Papa! Papa! I felt cold, so cold, in spite of the heat, and couldn't stop shaking."

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was tried and convicted for conspiracy to murder on false evidence, by a biased court, in a blatant bid to discredit him. On her last visit, the night before he was killed, Benazir found him "sitting on the floor on a mattress, the only furniture left in his cell". And, she adds, "(on) every other visit they allowed us to sit together. But not today. My mother and I squeezed together at the bars of his cell door".

The final good-bye was in front of the gaolers. Not allowed a last embrace, Benazir records her futile efforts to reach



(Clockwise from top): Benazir at Radcliffe; at Simla, 1972; Begum Bhutto leaving for cancer treatment abroad

out to her father through the bars. Even if there is a touch of Hollywood to the writing, the trauma and emotions are real. Their effect tells on the reader.

I suspect the politician in her was born at that tragic moment. Her inspiration, perhaps unacknowledgedly, must derive from a determination to vindicate her father and re-establish the democracy he briefly gave Pakistan in the '70s. Just how that happened is the story of how those dark, nightmarish days changed her life.

Born into a feudal landowning family, her father a barrister trained at Berkeley, Oxford and Lincolns Inn, her mother a former National Guards officer, Benazir is heir to both Sindhi traditionalism and the best of the modern West. She is the eldest of four children and from an early age had charge of her siblings. Responsibility came easily. Irish nuns taught her discipline, courtesy and service. Tutors were hired for Maths and English. Religion was

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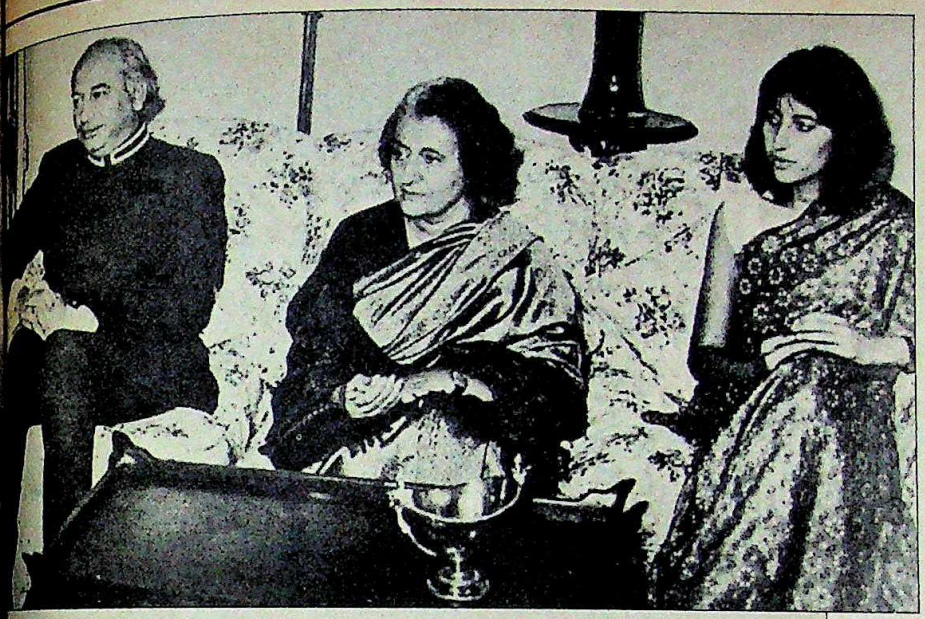

Today, Benazir sees the Bhuttos as Pakistan's Kennedys. More tellingly, she also compares her family to the Prophet Mohammed's.

observed, but the *purdah* her mother was forced to don in the early '50s never cast its shroud over Benazir. Instead, her sartorial influences came from Saks Fifth Avenue.

At 18 Rádcliffe and Oxford were obviously liberating experiences, although the political compulsions of Pakistan were never quite forgotten. She let her hair grow, played Joan Baez, ate peppermint ice-cream. Kate Millet and Ms magazine conditioned her views. "Night after night my friends and I gathered to talk about our aspirations for the future and what kind of rules would govern our relationships with the people we married—if indeed we chose to get married at all."

During the Bangladesh civil war, Benazir, a young sophomore, played switchboard operator to her father's UN diplomat. "Interrupt the meetings," he told her. "If the Soviets are here, tell me the Chinese are calling. If the Americans are here, tell me the Russians are on the line or the Indians. And don't tell anyone who *really* is here."

NOT surprisingly, when she returned home Benazir wanted to join the foreign service. She never did. Fate in the guise of General Zia intervened. "The general standing in front of me," she writes of their first meeting, "was a short, nervous, ineffectual-looking man whose pomaded hair was parted in the middle and lacquered to his head. He looked more like an English cartoon villain than an inspiring leader."

The villainy, however, soon became real. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed on July 5, 1977. For the next seven years his wife and daughter faced detentions, arrests, solitary confinements and exile. Benazir only spent one new year's day free. She was only released for 48 hours to attend her sister's wedding. For the rest, the army would surround her Karachi residence, storm her bedroom at night, bundle her on and off planes, tear gas her if she visited cricket matches and cut off her telephone.

In gaol she was subjected to temperatures of 120 degrees, flies, bees, grasshoppers, and given brackish water to drink. Her mother played patience and doused her head to keep cool. Benazir was prone to moments of self-pity. On one occasion she even saw ghosts. But she kept her sanity by reliving the past: "I dreamed of eating steak and mushrooms at the Sorbonne restaurant in Oxford. I dreamed of fresh apple cider in New England and peppermint ice-cream from Brighams."

When eventually she came to marry, no longer a debutante but a worldly-wise politician, it was a symbolic act by which she exorcised her own past. "An arranged marriage was the price in personal choice I had to pay for the political path my life had taken." At one stroke, Radcliffe, the Oxford Union and peppermint ice-cream had been laid to rest and, in their place, a new commitment to Islamabad was born.

But by then her's had become a life lived for a cause. That, I suppose, is the message of the book. And at its best it emerges as a portrait of heroism and spirit. Never for a moment, when we were presidents of rival Oxbridge unions in 1977, did I suppose that the smart, spoilt, sophisticated prime minister's daughter, with her flashy MGB and ringing laughter, had such reservoirs of strength and sheer guts. How little anyone knew her. Perhaps how little she knew herself.

That, too, is no longer the case. Today, Benazir sees the Bhuttos as Pakistan's Kennedys. More tellingly, she also compares her family to the Prophet Mohammed's. "In every generation, Shiite Muslims believe, there is a Karbala, a re-enactment of the tragedy that befell the family of the Prophet Mohammed... many in Pakistan believe that the victimisation of the Bhutto family and our supporters was the Karbala of our generation." Perhaps. But it took the original Karbala several generations to achieve temporal restitution. Till then they were just keepers of the flame. I hope November 16 will prove the analogy is not fully apt.

—KARAN THAPAR

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CRICKET

Familiar Fissures

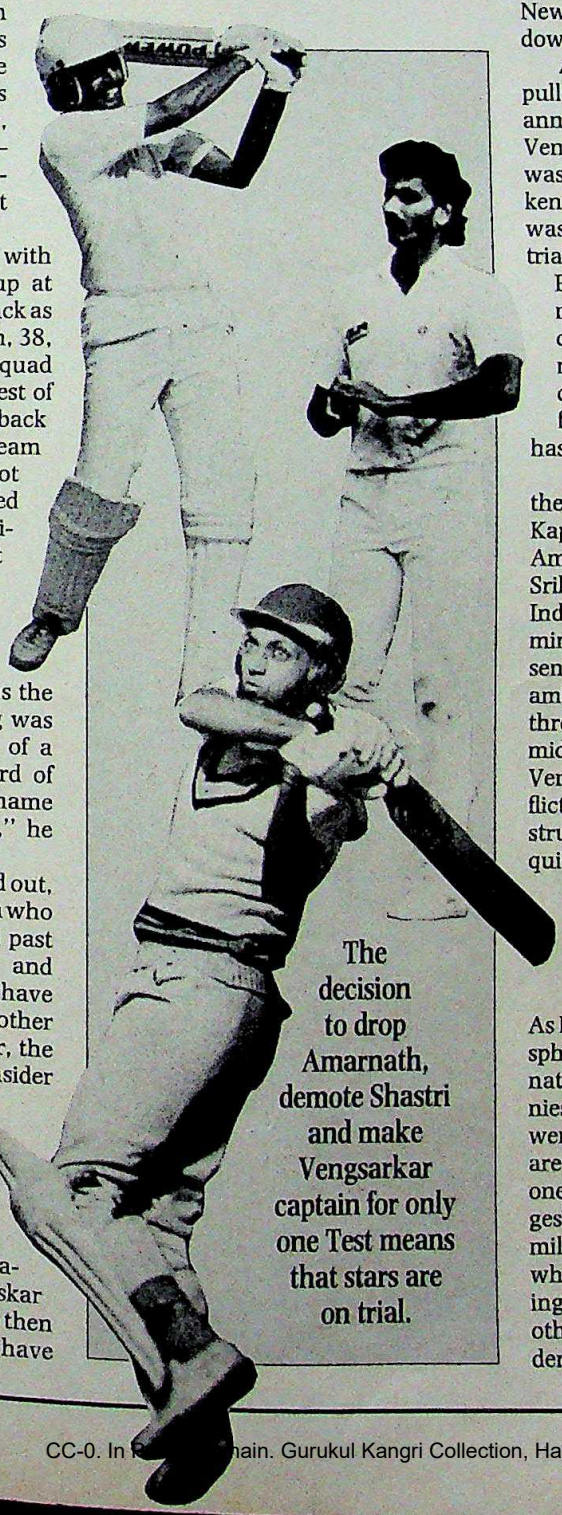
Age-old problems dog Indian cricket

THE season of cricket is back, setting to race the nation's sporting adrenalin and carrying along its kitbag full of controversies—all of them familiar, only bigger than ever before. Defeat has bred them, selections and omissions have bred them, and so has the question of captaincy. The season opened with ignominy at Sharjah, which was promptly attributed to friction between senior team members, including lack of cooperation and an unseemly squabble for the skipper's plumage. Ravi Shastri, one time golden boy of Indian cricket, was thereupon branded the bad boy, guilty of self-serving petulance—playing when it suits him and feigning medical problems when it doesn't.

The heat abated somewhat with India's facile win in the Asia Cup at Dhaka but took no time climbing back as old warhorse Mohinder Amarnath, 38, was dropped from the 14-member squad to play New Zealand in the first Test of the series. Amarnath, the comeback artiste, has been in and out of the team so often that it, normally, would not have created a ripple. But weighed against his recent form—his typically phoenix 74 not out against Pakistan in the Asia Cup semi-final—and his gutsy qualities, the selectors' decision was widely judged as unfair. Sitting quietly at home on Diwali, Amarnath was the picture of dejection. The dropping was unexpected, and he felt it to be of a pattern with the consistent record of discrimination against him. "My name is Amarnath. That is the reason," he explained morosely.

Certainly, as Amarnath pointed out, there were other players in the team who had fared worse than him in the past season, stars like Shastri and Azharuddin included. But "they have different standards for me and for other players", he complained. However, the fact is that the selectors did consider dropping the high-profile Shastri as well, but shied away from the tough decision, haunted as they were by the memory of the storm that had followed the ejection of Kapil Dev in the series against England three seasons ago, and that of Sunil Gavaskar before that. On both occasions, the then board president had intervened to have the superstar reinstated.

Though the selectors refrained from saying anything publicly about their deliberations over Shastri, they reasoned that Amarnath was dropped to make place for Navjot Singh Sidhu, whose power-packed sixes have delighted cricket fans in one-day internationals. But, Tests are a different ball game, and here Sidhu's experience is limited, and his record uninspiring—his debut against the West Indies in 1983 was a Test-class disaster; and then in another unburied controversy Sidhu inexplicably cried off from facing the same country's pace battery in early 1988. Perhaps, it is reckoned, that a friendlier New Zealand attack may help him settle down in the big league.



The decision to drop Amarnath, demote Shastri and make Vengsarkar captain for only one Test means that stars are on trial.

Another strange rabbit the selectors pulled out after their manner was the announcement that 32-year-old Dilip Vengsarkar's appointment to lead India was only for the first Test. The outspoken, former captain Bishen Singh Bedi was livid: "After 98 Tests he is still on trial. I think it is diabolical." Tiger Pataudi too felt the Colonel deserved more of a chance to find his feet as captain. "It is not easy to deal with so many senior players. When I was captain, I had only one real contender for captaincy, Chandu Borde. Dilip has to deal with many."

Therein, most likely, lies the rub. In the post-Gavaskar era, superstars like Kapil Dev, Ravi Shastri, Mohinder Amarnath, and even Krishnamachari Srikkanth are looking forward to leading India. With Vengsarkar being kept interminably on trial, and his ability to keep senior players on a leash in some doubt, ambitions seem to have expanded. The three nation tournament at Sharjah in mid-October didn't help any. Under Vengsarkar India lost to an injury-afflicted West Indies and an obviously struggling Pakistan. The bested captain quickly blamed the debacle on the poor form of Shastri, Kapil Dev and Amarnath, presumably setting up more problems for himself.

The fact is that the *esprit de corps* in the Indian squad is pretty bleak. As Bedi says: "The dressing-room atmosphere has been terrible beyond imagination." Though Vengsarkar hotly denies this, other former cricket stars who were present at Sharjah insist that there are serious problems. After all what does one make of young Maninder Singh gesticulating defiantly, in full view of the millions watching the live telecast, when Vengsarkar chided him for a fielding lapse. The team grapevine is full of other similar behind-the-scenes incidents. Says Pataudi: "They were in a

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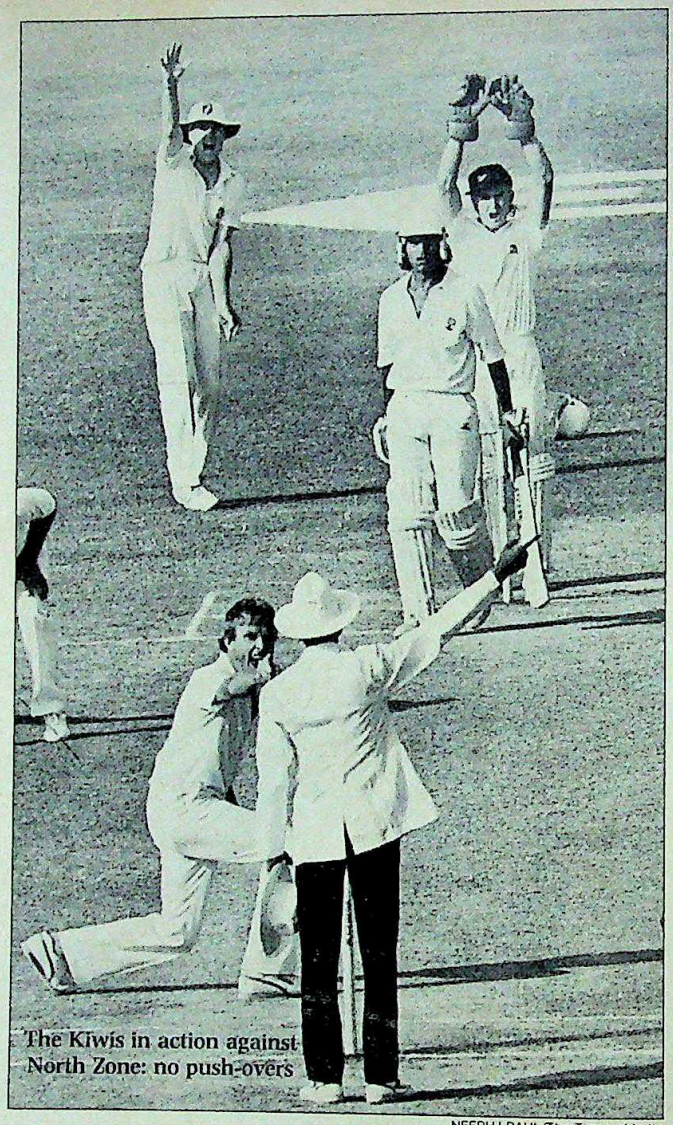
groove of recrimination at Sharjah."

Instead of leading to a closing of ranks, the stories and rumours of serious differences within the team have led to a sudden closing of mouths. Shastri, 26, insists: "I have heard of the west-north divide since I started playing cricket, but I don't think the problem exists at all." Selection Committee Chairman, Raj Singh Dungarpur, who has been tour manager for Indian teams, agrees: "Once they are out in the middle, they play for India, not for themselves. It is such a noble game, and it brings out the best in them." Vengsarkar extends the argument: "Look, there are no hassles. We are disciplined guys. People may play for themselves, but it is ultimately for the country."

But the fact still remains that key players like Mohammad Azharuddin, 25, Kapil Dev, 29, and Shastri have another problem: lack of form. Says Pataudi: "If we were only playing Test cricket, Kapil wouldn't have been in the team."



The Kiwis in action against North Zone: no push-overs

NEERHJ PAUL/The Times of India

At such a time, when India has too many superstars, not all in form, what it desperately needs is a father figure as manager. Observers, however, feel that the appointed manager for the New Zealand series, former star batsman Gundappa Vishwanath, might not be able to fit the bill. Said an expert: "Vishy is a nice guy, but some of these guys can walk all over him. He is not cut out for the job."

Fortunately, the season is not scheduled to be taxing since the English tour was cancelled amid recriminations. There is talk now of a late tour by Pakistan, which may prove more fun after all. So far the season is limited to the relatively short tour by the lowly-rated New Zealand, who are yet unlikely to prove push-overs, spearheaded as they are by the matchless Richard Hadlee. The 37-year-old all time great all rounder, is poised to achieve on Indian soil, the honour of being the highest wicket taker in Test history by overtaking Ian Botham's 373 wickets. Hadlee let his intentions be clearly known in the first match the Kiwis played in India, at Rajkot, when he destroyed an impressive West Zone batting line-up by capturing 9 wickets for just 55 runs. The message was not lost. Vengsarkar agrees: "Hadlee is our main threat." Shastri concurs: "Hadlee can change not only the series but also cricketers." But Pataudi has the wry comment: "If Hadlee alone can turn the series around, we would have to be very bad."

However, there are others too. Captain John Wright, 34, closing in on the 5,000-run mark, despite a bout of gastro-enteritis last month, smacked the West and North Zone bowlers for a century each. But he does not scare Vengsarkar, who says: "He is basically a grafter, he cannot take the battle into the enemy's camp."

Alongside the pitch battles, some off-field fireworks have already set up a contentious backdrop to the series. Both Hadlee and Wright have signed up with Kapil's Dev Features (for an undisclosed amount) and will be covering the series in Indian newspapers. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which had compelled cricketers to sign an iron-clad contract prohibiting the skipper from even addressing the press without the manager's permission, now faces the dilemma of the New Zealand skipper taking pot shots at the Indian team and umpiring in prime space on sports pages. The players are clear: they want to write. "*Yeh to hamaara dhanda hai* (this is our business)," says Kapil Dev about cricket, while carping against the board's proscription.

Moreover, with Amarnath out of the team and Shastri, Kapil and Azharuddin in poor form, India's much-vaunted batting line-up appears a trifle vulnerable. Pataudi puts his finger on the problem: "Nobody can decide who's going to be the anchor."

There are other problems, more prosaic, but equally relevant. New Zealand has never been a great draw in India and crowd interest will be low: few expect even half-full houses during the Tests at Bangalore, Bombay and Hyderabad. Cricket authorities are keeping their fingers crossed that the one-dayers at Vishakhapatnam, Cuttack, Indore, Vadodara and Jammu will keep the BCCI happy even though players on both sides would prefer playing at major metropolitan centres. But the curious electoral politics and financial realities—smaller centres assure full houses at one-day matches—dictate the choice. A season of less cricket and more controversy seems to lie ahead.

—SALIL TRIPATHI with DAVID DEVADAS

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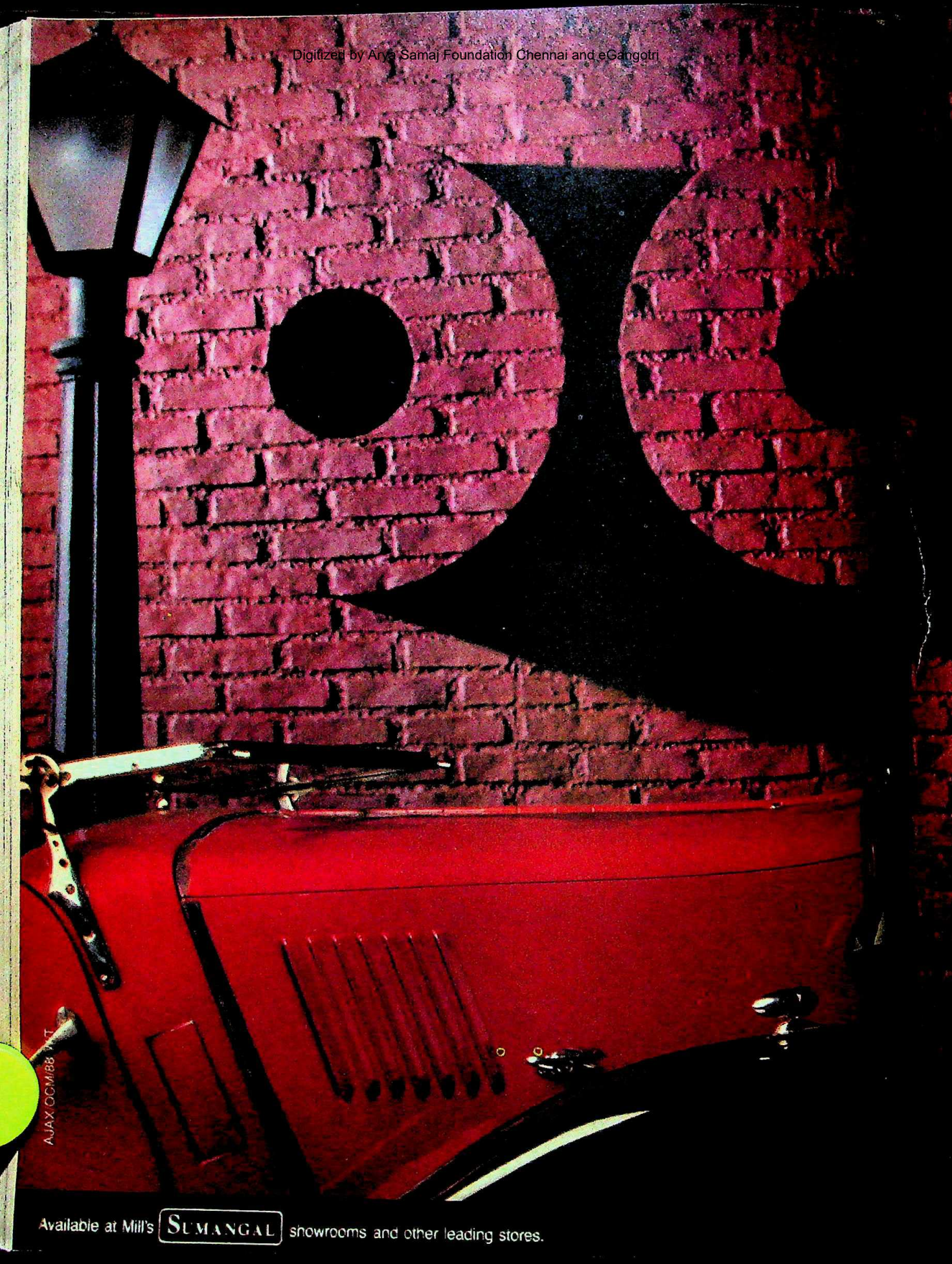

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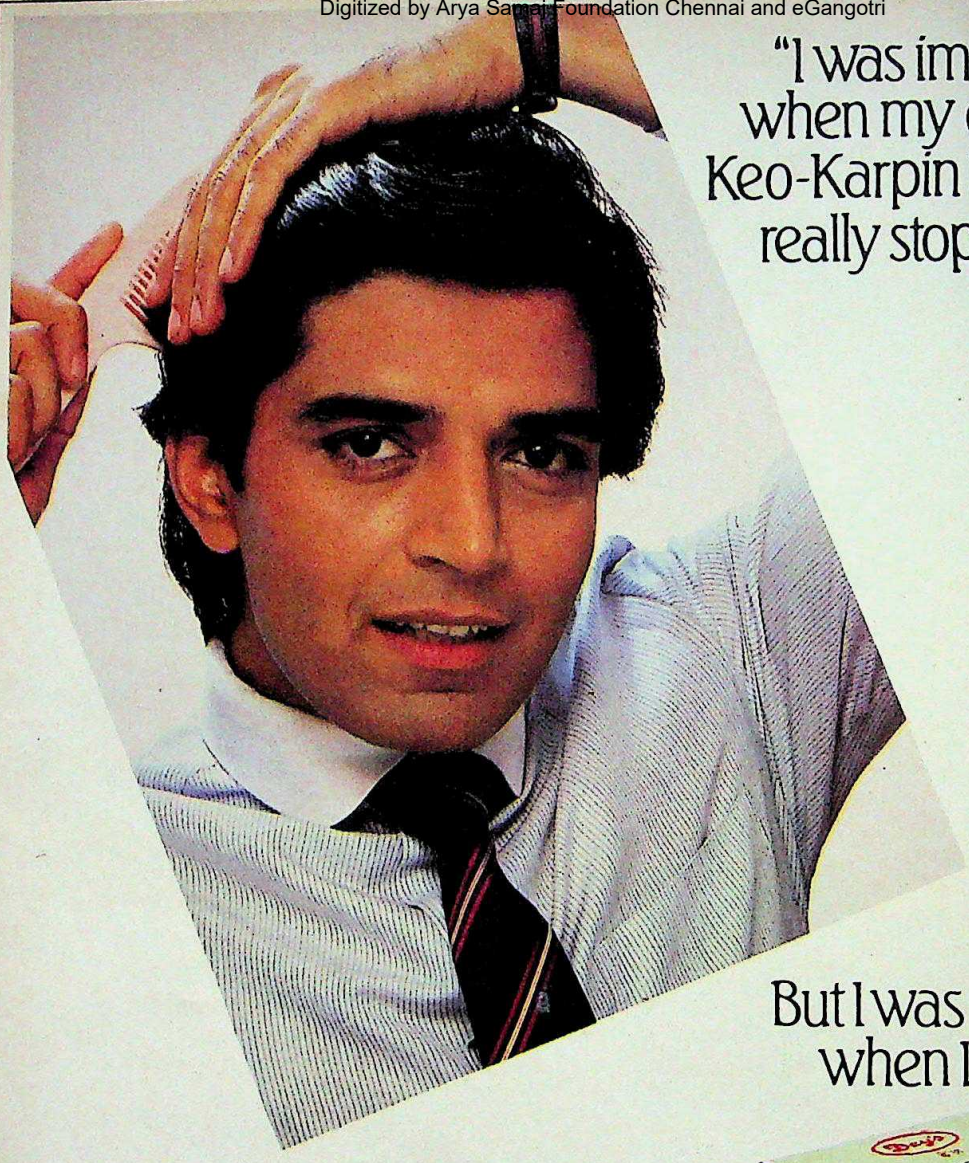

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MOUNTAINEERING

Himalayan Blunders

Errors cost 18 lives

WITH the wind getting frosty and the snow beginning to seal the high passes, ushering in the Himalayan winter, another hectic mountaineering season in India—which saw 177 expeditions, including 116 Indian—has concluded. But it has been an unhappy one, claiming 18 lives, the highest in the last 10 years, and maiming several others, with frost-bite, pulmonary and cerebral oedema and hypothermia (body temperature dipping below normal).

Misfortune struck with the very onset of the season in May. Sunil Kharkar died on an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay, expedition to Gangotri III (6,577 metres). Later that month, the assault of a Bombay club, Girivihar, on Kangchenjungha (8,386 metres) was abandoned; its deputy leader, Sanjay Borole, 27, dead of hypothermia.

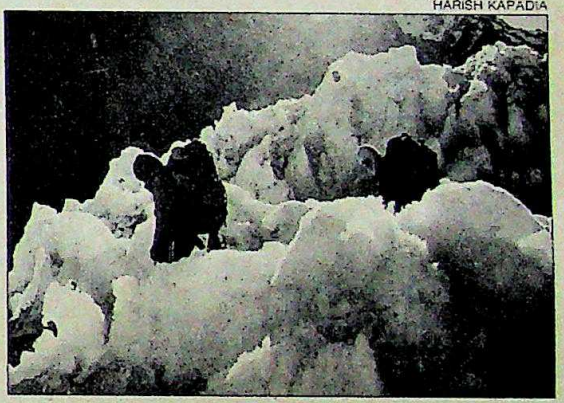
Foreign teams fared no better. At Nun (7,135 metres), a member of the British team slipped and died; two Swiss climbers had a fatal slip close to the Kun summit (7,087 metres); and at Satopanth (7,075 metres), a German climber suffering from oedema, succumbed during evacuation.

The mountains this year claimed trekkers too. Says H.C. Sarin, honorary president of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF): "We have never lost so many before." In September, six trekkers from 24 Parganas in West Bengal died in the Lahaul Valley, and two others, Nidhir Kumar Pal and Debabrata Mukherjee of the Durgapur Mountaineering Association, died near Purbi Dunagiri (6,489 metres). Says S. Bhattacharjee, secretary of Delhi's Climbers and Explorers Club: "If untrained people take off without any advice, this is what happens."

While death snuffed out the young, adventurous, and reckless, the plight of the maimed is worse. Doctors say morbidity and psychological trauma of survivors is as tragic as the finality of death. K. Lavraju, 26, a free-lance photographer from Bangalore, had his toes amputated after being frost bitten at Ladakh, while Jiten Vaidya of IIT lost his fingers and two toes.

HARISH KAPADIA

The young new enthusiasts are over-confident, under-prepared, ill-equipped and worse, careless.



Air force chopper on a rescue mission; trekking through a glacier

The IIT Gangotri III expedition is a classic case of adverse circumstances, coupled with errors of judgement. Vaidya, Mukund Chitale, and Kharkar left to ascend the peak with a high-altitude porter early on May 15. The ascent was quick, but weather took a turn for the worse. They waited on a flat stretch of land. Then Kharkar chose to descend. Vaidya tried to stop him, but could not; he was hallucinating. Later when Chitale and Vaidya marched downward, they saw Kharkar's body, failed to revive him, and found the rest of their team waving to them from below. The spot where they had halted was 2,000 ft from the camp, but away from eyeshot, rendering signals useless. To most, the incident smacked of amateurishness. Why did the group carry no walkie-talkies? Why did the camp climbers not send out a search party? Why did Vaidya and Chitale have only tea at the camp, hardly eating much in the next 72 hours, a prime necessity during the early stage of frost-bite to regenerate organs and rejuvenate blood flow to the extremities? Then they suffered at the hands of doctors. At Uttarkashi, the doctors treated the matter lightly and in Bombay the doctor was unsympathetic, admonishing them for irresponsible behaviour, and diagnosing amputation of fingers and toes. But Rodhan Shroff, an experienced mountaineer and surgeon, attempted conservative therapy of hyperbaric oxygen (where oxygen is administered at high pressure to reactivate blood flow and prevent gangrene spread) and physiotherapy with high-nutrition diet. It did not work. Vaidya's fingers were amputated; Chitale's were, however, saved.

Vaidya was aware of their mistakes. "We should have carried small tents. Also, not carrying an altimeter was a mistake. It would have told us about the weather; we did not know altimeters did that." Unlike Chitale, Vaidya was wearing Indian shoes, and not Koflach, and he blames the loss of his toes to that.

If the IIT team had climbers raw in Himalayan terms, the Girivihar attempt to scale Kangchenjungha was well-

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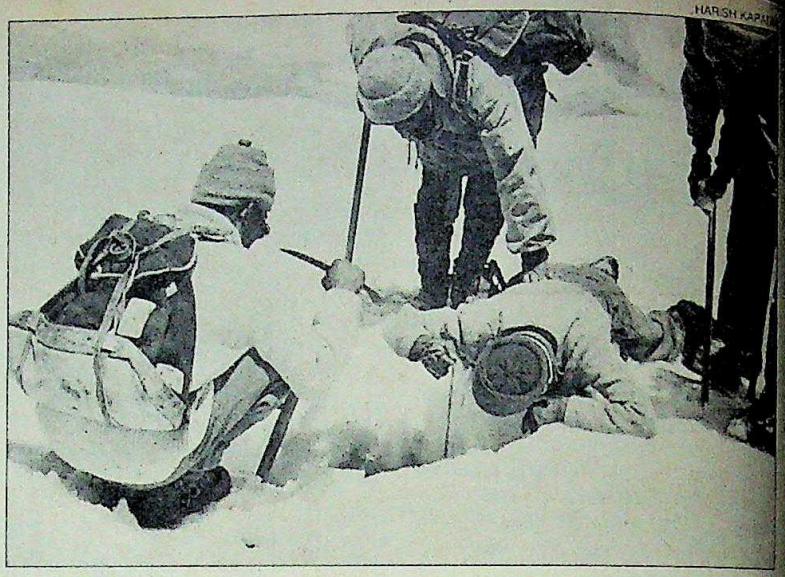
equipped, well-funded, and some members had scaled Kamet, India's third-highest peak (7,711 metres). But the high-profile 24-member-civilian expedition with strong political support (Sharad Pawar and Bal Thackeray) was criticised for being too large, too costly and too ambitious. Leader Vasant Limaye defends this charge: "We became the first all-civilian team to go as high as 8,000 metres." About Borole's death he is circumspect, admitting responsibility but not error. Borole had gone with the ascent party, but deteriorating weather forced them to descend. Shortly afterward, Borole felt fatigued. He waited to rest. They resumed descent. Soon after, Borole was exhausted again. Eighty minutes later, he succumbed to hypothermia. Limaye says: "I was in constant touch with him, but he kept telling me he could go on." Experienced mountaineers have been critical: they feel Borole should not have been allowed to take such an important decision considering the state he was in. Says Harish Kapadia, veteran mountaineer and assistant editor of the *Himalayan Journal* of the Himalayan Club, among the oldest mountaineering clubs in the world: "When you are sick in the mountains, your mind does not function properly."

WHILE Indians have discovered the Great Outdoors late, growth has been brisk. More and more Indians are pulling on their hunters, strapping on rucksacks, and wearing faded denims, to explore the hills near their cities. School outings are giving way to hikes, and college camps and picnics are becoming minor expeditions. Posters of Four Square kings with hunks of guys doing rock climbing, and the Campa Cola river-rafting advertisements with all the macho ingredients thrown in, have made mountaineering a glamour sport.

But, alarmingly, awareness of dangers and risks remains minimal. The young, new enthusiasts suffer from over-confidence, ignorance of basic safety rules, and are often under-prepared, ill-equipped, and worse, careless. In 1983, for example, youngsters went to Rudugaira wearing hunter shoes—four returned with frost-bite. Says Kapadia: "These boys just don't listen to you. They are arrogant; they feel they have read a book and that's enough."

Commercial interests have worsened matters. Travel agencies, with little experience of the terrain, have announced treks in the Himalaya. Moreover, new climbers are often ignorant about nutrition. Use of inadequate equipment also makes for disasters. Indian mountaineers are known to use helmets sparingly, though it is considered necessary for rock climbing. A 15-year-old boy slipped and died in Kashmir because the rope he was attaching himself to was frayed, and no one had bothered to check.


HARISH KAPADIA

Searching for a fallen climber in a crevasse: unhappy season

What is happening is that new mountaineers have reduced mountaineering to only a competitive peak-scaling sport. Older aficionados are appalled by this. The Soviets even wanted to include mountaineering in the Olympic movement, but top international mountaineers vetoed the proposal. Says Shroff: "Mountaineering is not about conquests: you cannot conquer nature, you conquer your own weaknesses."

Besides competitiveness, high costs are also forcing mountaineers to develop a ruthless spirit of do or die. Expeditions are getting expensive and since mountaineers are dependent on corporations for funds, they do not want to return with failure and the prospect of no future sponsors.

Bringing in an attitudinal change is the prime need. Mountaineers feel discipline and humility can bring about this change. Clubs are debating ways in which injuries can be prevented and slip-shod management by institutions be made more accountable. Also, insurance for mountaineers is a must. A policy of Rs 1 lakh costs only Rs 500 for a four-week expedition, and the high cost of post-accident care is sufficient reason for members of expeditions to insure themselves.

Dr K.S. Charak, who has written *Medical Guide to Climbers and Trekkers*, is for more efficent evacuation methods and the elementary knowledge of physiology among mountaineers, since few doctors can spare two months every year to accompany expeditions. The IMF can organise evacuations, including the use of helicopters, but has no medical facilities at its disposal.

Senior climbers advise parents to check the antecedents of leaders and organisations before packing their kids off on expeditions. The setting up of a centralised permit-issuing authority is essential. At present, the home and defence ministries, district magistrates, state governments, IMF, and, in some cases, even tehsildars have the authority to issue permits, allowing inexperienced teams to take to the mountains.

Ultimately, what really matters is that you go with people you know: that establishes trust, reduces competitiveness, and targets like height become less relevant.

Infrastructural improvement, streamlined permissions, responsible leadership, awareness of one's limitations, and especially attitudinal changes, can make mountaineering the rewarding experience it is meant to be—of breath-taking panorama, shimmering lakes, sky-high peaks and camp fires on star-lit nights. Mountaineering is not so dangerous, as awry attitudes are.

—SALIL TRIPATHI with NANDITA SARDANA in New Delhi and KAMALJEET RATTAN in Darjeeling

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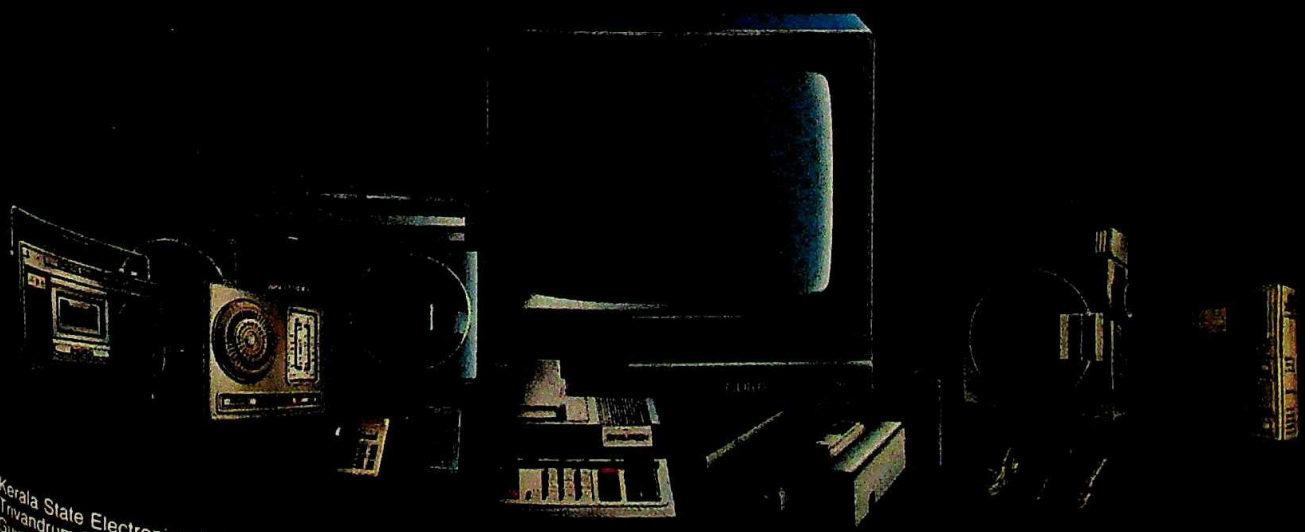

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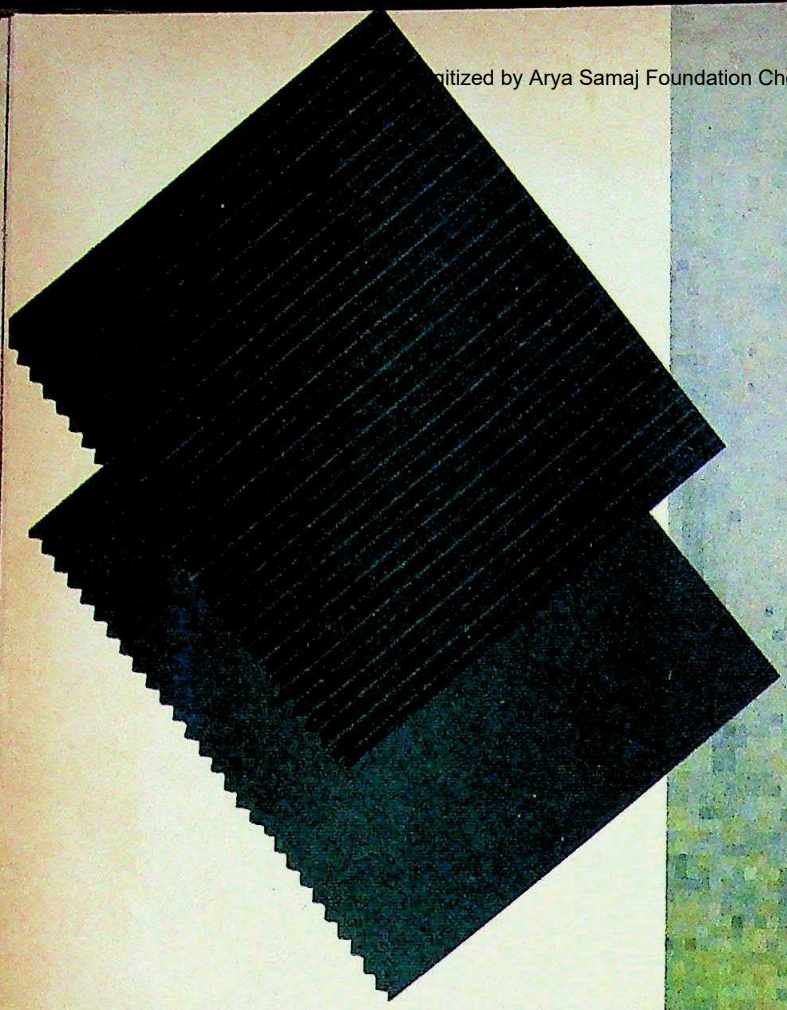

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BRIDGE

Bridging the Gap

A respectable showing at Venice Olympiad

EVERY Olympiad needn't be a disappointment. Just a fortnight after the frustrations of Seoul ended last month, India produced a surprise card. Its team emerged fourth in a field of 56 at the Bridge Olympiad in Venice.

The feat was remarkable. It was the first time an Asian country had reached the semi-finals in a game dominated by Europe and North America. And to get there, it convincingly pushed aside Greece, which had been unbeaten in the tournament until that quarter-final. Although India was subdued in the semi-final, the consolation is that the victors in that round, the US, went on to become the overall champions.

Indian men have long been a regional power at the bridge table, generally managing to keep the trumps between the Pakistanis and themselves. But beating world aces is new. "Given proper coaching and practice, we can easily get right to the top," says S.G. Bose Mullick, president of the Bridge Federation of India. "As it is, if we had met any other team in the semis, we could surely have made it to the finals."

That is no idle boast. Jaggy Shivdasani, for one, has already won international acclaim. He and his partner, Rajesh Dalal, are only in their 30s and, in bridge, that's lisping young. Tenacious players enter international tournaments in their late 60s.

While the talent is promising, some of the credit for this year's achievement must go to Delhi-based computer giant HCL's Shiv Nadar. He has supported the mens team's expenses over the last year and a half.

But if Indian men came up aces, some women players pointed accusing fingers at what they called the knavery of the federation. Selection trials for women had been scrapped earlier in the year and some of India's bridge queens cried foul. Rita Choksi and Lina Mayadas in particular felt the whole process was deliberately orchestrated to keep them out of the team. Though the women performed somewhat better than they had in the past—coming 28th among 37 teams—Choksi and Mayadas were not impressed. "We could certainly have done better. This time we had been practising together daily since the beginning of the year," says Choksi.

The two have been unpopular with federation officials ever since they put their names to a critical open letter in 1985. Always used to calling a spade a spade, they had squarely blamed federation bungling for their rout at the prestigious Venice Cup Tournament in Sao Paulo that year as they had not received the systems by which their opponents played. A bridge system is the set of norms by which a team's moves must be interpreted. Without these, the Indian women were reduced to virtually shooting in the dark.

Officials plead that the World Bridge Federation failed to send them the rival systems. But, counters Mayadas, "our officials would not even listen to us there, leave alone help us to cope". The letter, addressed to Mullick, listed a string of other complaints against officials. Mullick insists that the letter had nothing to do with the signatories not being included in this year's team. He does say, however, that the selection committee he appointed went into "factors relating to team work and discipline apart from the play itself".

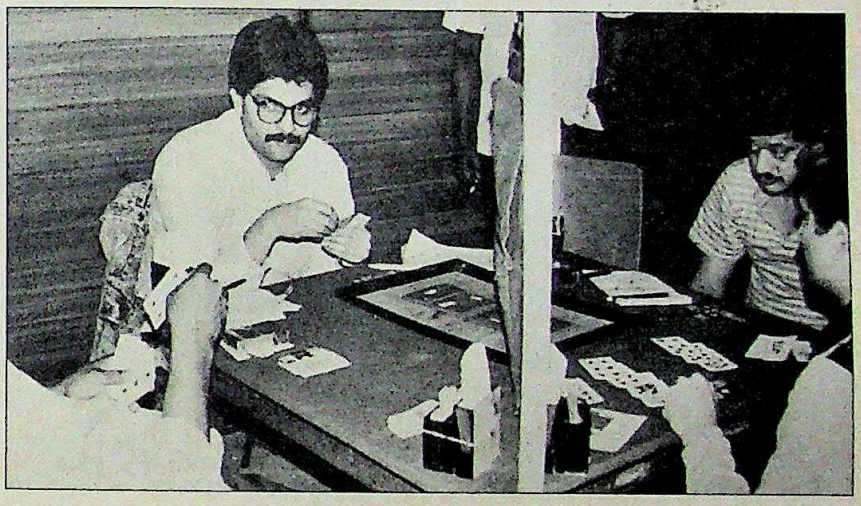
Clearly, government norms were flouted when the federation nominated a selection committee for women on the plea that there were not enough entries to hold trials. Even some officials privately admit that Choksi and Mayadas are better players than some of those chosen. As the two ladies themselves have no doubt that they are, they caused some high-tension drama before the teams departed for Venice.

Torn between angry letters from Bharatiya Janata Party President L.K. Advani, demanding that clearance to the teams be withheld, and fervent pleas for clearance from officials and players, the Government vacillated. There were some piquant moments such as when Choksi and one of the chosen team members—Nadar's wife, Kiran—found themselves waiting together outside Minister of State for Sports Margaret Alva's office.

Alva finally allowed both teams to go but refused to pay their costs. Exasperated, she told INDIA TODAY: "How many little squabbles can I deal with? These are club games. We have to concentrate on a few games where we can win medals."

Quite. But if the gap between India and the world's best has been bridged only in 'club games' like billiards and chess, no one's complaining.

—DAVID DEVADAS



Young Jaggy Shivdasani has already won international acclaim. With proper practice, India could easily reach for the top.

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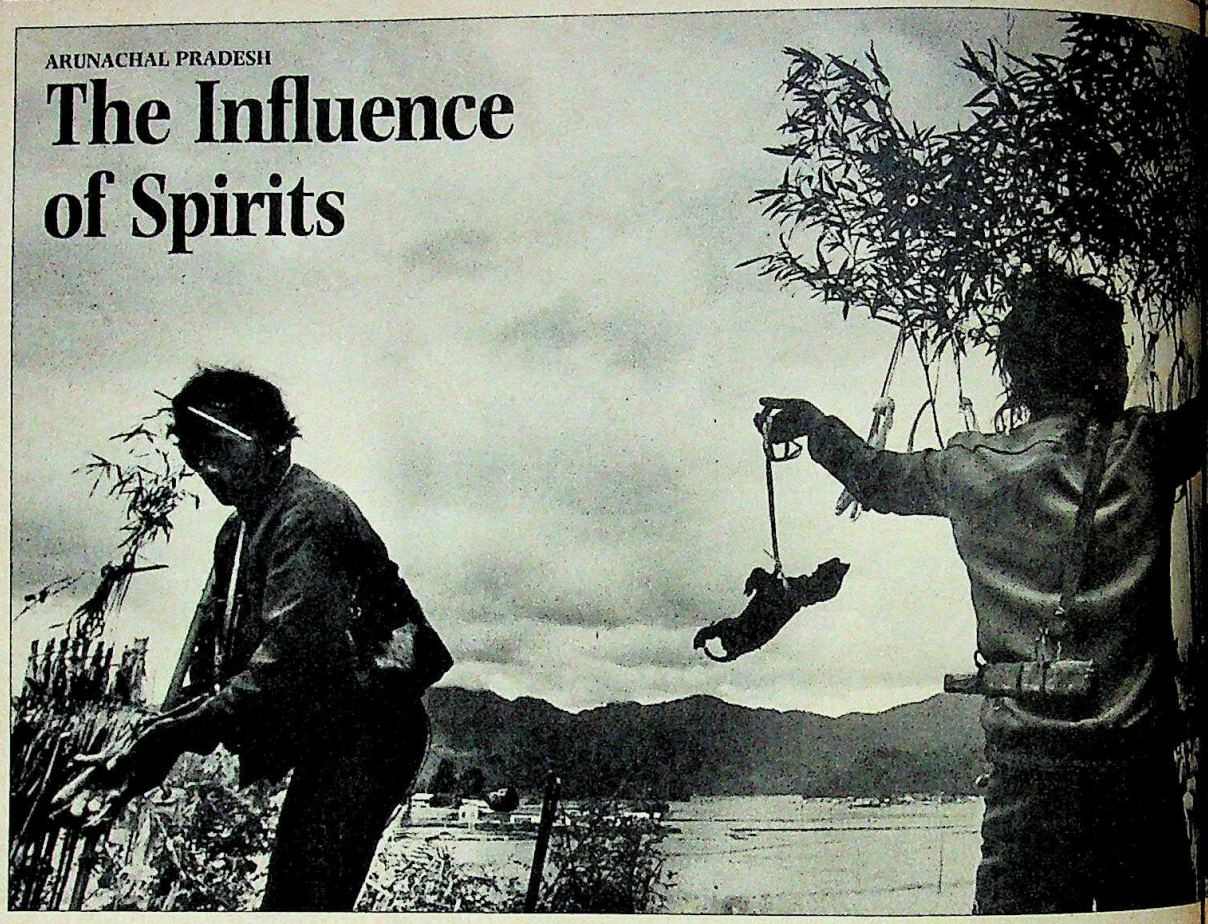
ARUNACHAL PRADESH

The Influence of Spirits



HE is called *dandai*, the tribal priest. And here, in the easternmost tip of the country in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, his incantations and often grisly rites hold total sway. Here, faith still transcends everything and no one questions age-old beliefs. The state's 80-odd tribes continue to cling to their ancestors' world view: human lives are governed by spirits, which can be malevolent or benevolent. The only person who can mediate with spirits is the *dandai*.

Every disease or misfortune is attributed to a particular evil spirit. So, every family in distress calls in the *dandai* to propitiate the spirit concerned and bring back well being. And whenever a person falls ill, it is the *dandai*, rather than the doctor, whose services are sought.

Little wonder then that Arunachal has the distinction of being the only state in the country which does not have a doctor pursuing private practice. A doctor who started private practice in Bomdila a few years ago soon became a contractor—definitely a more paying proposition. The *dandais* meanwhile continue to be in great demand, despite their long and complicated treatment.

First, the spirit responsible for the affliction is divined, the mode of identification differing from tribe to tribe. Among the Wanchos, it is done by breaking raw eggs—the position of the shells indicating the omen. For the Tangsas the portent is presaged by the position of the legs of a sacrificed chicken, for the Apa Tanis it is gleaned by the shape of the sacrificed chicken's liver. Then, after the evil spirit is identified, the *dandai* determines which animal should be sacrificed to propitiate it. It could be a cow, pig, goat, chicken, dog or cat. Sometimes, however, the cure is more benign. In Soha village of Tirap district, a headache is "cured" by freeing a chicken into the jungles, thus appeasing the Hakho spirit.

The tribals' belief that spirits influence the course of human life in all its aspects is unyielding. The Mishmis of Lohit believe that if they neglect the Bruhutang deity, pregnant women will suffer miscarriages or newborns will be harmed. And among the Idu Mishmis, if a person has visited a house where someone has died, he cannot re-enter his own house unless the *dandai* purifies him, as it is believed that an evil spirit had caused the death.

Not surprisingly, the *dandais* also ap-
ply their powers for the benefit of thei
own families. Last month, for instance
Nara Kena, a *dandai*, performed a series
sacrifices for the well-being of his family
Hija village in lower Subansiri district.
an isolated spot in the Apa Tani valley
Nara Kena lighted a fire in front of severa
bamboo images of spirits. He cracked
eggs one after another and poured th
contents into a hollow bamboo tub
leaving it to cook over the fire. Afte
chanting mantras, he sliced the necks
three chickens and a dog and smeared th
images with blood. He then threw th
chickens and the dog into the fire to roas
before he and fellow priests settled dow
to drink rice beer and munch roasted flesh
for dinner as the sun disappeared behin
the hills, content that they had done the
bit to appease the omnipotent spirits.

This belief in the influence of spirit
persists even among educated tribal
Says Kojtaki, 21, a science student
can't explain our beliefs and faith scientifi
cally. But we have faith in the need
sacrifice to keep spirits happy." Adds K
Kozee, a senior circle officer: "We've ha
believing that spirits cause illness

A *dandai* o
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A *dandai* offers a burnt dog and chicken (left); Buguns performing tribal rites: appeasing the spirits

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Given the prevalence of such views, it isn't surprising that sick persons go to a hospital only after the *dandai*'s treatment has failed. Thus, unlike in the rest of the country, the 175-odd doctors in government service aren't hard pressed and the state hospitals never crowded.

BUT this attitude of abjuring modern medicine often leads to tragic consequences. Two years ago, a seriously injured male was rushed to an Itanagar hospital after a bus accident. His family, however, took him to their village to be treated by a *dandai*. His intercession did not help matters and the patient's plight deteriorated. Faced with little choice, his family readmitted him to hospital three months later. But it was too late. His leg had to be amputated. Says an exasperated K. Zaman, an Itanagar-based doctor: "Cancer patients advised to go in for radiotherapy would instead go to a *dandai* and ultimately die."

And often, even when the propitiation of malevolent spirits by *dandais* does not produce the desired results and patients slide into a worsening condition, the *dandais* are never blamed. The tribals just resign themselves to the fact that the gods are unwilling to oblige. Remarks Bipul Bora, a Ziro-based doctor: "If our medicines fail we get castigated, but the *dandai* is above all criticism."

Even those few who do venture into hospitals simultaneously call *dandais* to perform pujas and sacrifices while they swallow allopathic pills. So deep is this faith that doctors—to avoid hurting tribal sentiment—allow this.

A couple of years ago, Chief Minister Gegong Apang, who is a great believer in the *dandais*' power, had to be rushed to an Itanagar hospital for an emergency appendicitis operation. As he lay convalescing, a *dandai* performed rituals at his bedside. Early this year, Apang—who was perfectly healthy this time—got four hens sacrificed in his house as a *dandai* had said this was essential if he was to become clever and brave. He isn't alone in his faith. Many of his cabinet colleagues abstain from attending to matters of state if their *dandais* so decree. It is a system few can oppose.

Dr G. Yomcha, deputy director of health services, had an attack of amoebic dysentery two months ago. He immediately took allopathic medicines but his wife, a *dandai*, wasn't satisfied. She performed her own puja, and sacrificed a goat, pig and six chickens. While Yomcha is convinced that it was his drugs which led to his recovery, his wife feels it was her ritualistic intercession which cured her husband. Yomcha admits that when he was posted as a government doctor in various districts, his wife was more popular with his patients, who after taking allopathic medicines would exhort her to satisfy the spirits.

The *dandais* mainly administer herbal medicine which is easily extracted from plants and trees found in the forested areas. While it is ineffective for diseases like tuberculosis and typhoid, patients suffering from psychosomatic ailments respond favourably to the *dandais*' treatment. This, according to Swami Prathamananda, secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission in Itanagar—which runs one of the best hospitals in the North-east—is due to the patient's intense faith in *dandais*. Says he: "Faith is a great healer."

One example of this being the case of Habung Gambo, 25, a research officer at Ziro. For some weeks he'd felt he was losing his appetite. Last month he explained the problem to a *dandai*. After sacrificing some chickens and examining their livers, the *dandai* concluded that a cow and a pig would have to be sacrificed to satisfy the evil spirit that had possessed Gambo. Soon after the sacrifice Gambo claimed he had regained his appetite. The explanation may seem obvious but Gambo's cure is looked upon by fellow Apa Tani tribals as the *dandai*'s victory over the evil spirit. This is how word spreads and the faith gets reinforced.

The frequency and intensity of environmental disasters like floods, earthquakes and landslides in this region further cement this faith as the simplistic tribals feel totally helpless before nature.

Before Independence, there were hardly any doctors in the state and there was no choice but to go to a *dandai*. Now, there are doctors at least in the district headquarters but the tradition of *dandais* continues. Says anthropologist Parul Chandra Dutta: "Tribals in Arunachal are traditionalists and so modern waves of change have not affected them much. Because of their beliefs and superstitions they are made out to be primitive, but

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aren't the bulk of Indians superstitious?"

A tribal in Arunachal Pradesh would find it difficult to conceive life without the *dandais*—so dominant is their influence. Says Forest Minister Mukut Mithi: "Life for many of us would be unimaginable without a *dandai*." But it cannot be denied that underdevelopment has facilitated this domination of tradition.

Only 20 per cent of the state is connected by road—denying access to modern medical facilities. Planners point out that a scientific temper can be fostered only if communication is improved in the state—presently, there are places where one has to walk a week to reach any primary health centre.

A *dandai* performing the propitiatory ritual

OF late, however, due to improvement in communication facilities and a gradual increase in literacy, awareness of the importance of modern medicine and science has grown. Already, *dandais* have started recommending hospitals to patients before conducting sacrifices. And last month, Koj Hanyas' family in Ziro made a *dandai* sacrifice a cow in front of their house, so that Hanyas would get well in hospital.

There are more examples of this attitudinal change which is creeping in slowly. When the Ramakrishna Mission Hospital started in the early '80s, there were hardly any patients. Now over 500 people attend the outpatient department daily. In one of the wards lies Genden Darjee, a tuberculosis patient from Bomdila, who has realised the magic of modern medicine as he recovers from a months-long *dandai*'s treatment which only resulted in calcifying a part of his lungs. Kaiboo Phiang, a *dandai* from the Bugun tribe, concedes that there are many diseases which can be cured only by doctors.

Not a priestly class as such, the *dandais* are simple folk who work in the fields or do odd jobs. They make little money performing pujas and sacrifices and consequently require a secondary source of income. Says Yido Boze, 39, a police inspector who doubles as a *dandai* too: "I don't want my children to become *dandais*. They would be better off as officers." Till now, most *dandais* just followed their parents in becoming tribal priests, though there was no definite rule. Explains Sangja Murphew, a Bomdila resident: "Our priests like Indian prime ministers come in a hereditary fashion."

Identifying an evil spirit by examining the shape of a chicken's liver

But the *dandais* realise that with the encroachment of modernisation, their position in society will not remain unchallenged. Admits Narang Tani, 25, an agriculture inspector: "The educated younger generation has slowly started questioning rituals."

The times are indeed changing—if slowly. Though Arunachal Pradesh today is a veritable dreamland for any sociologist as the tribal population continues to follow a fascinating array of rituals and beliefs, within a decade or so, most of their myths will be found only in dusty tomes. As Koj Guro, a *dandai* from the Apa Tani tribe, contends modern medicine—and, by implication, modern civilisation—may find new adherents, but faith in tradition and culture should not vanish. And in trying to reach a balance between the two, the tribals will merely be treading the same path that societies the world over have followed while making the transition to an industrial age.

—RAMESH MENON in Arunachal Pradesh

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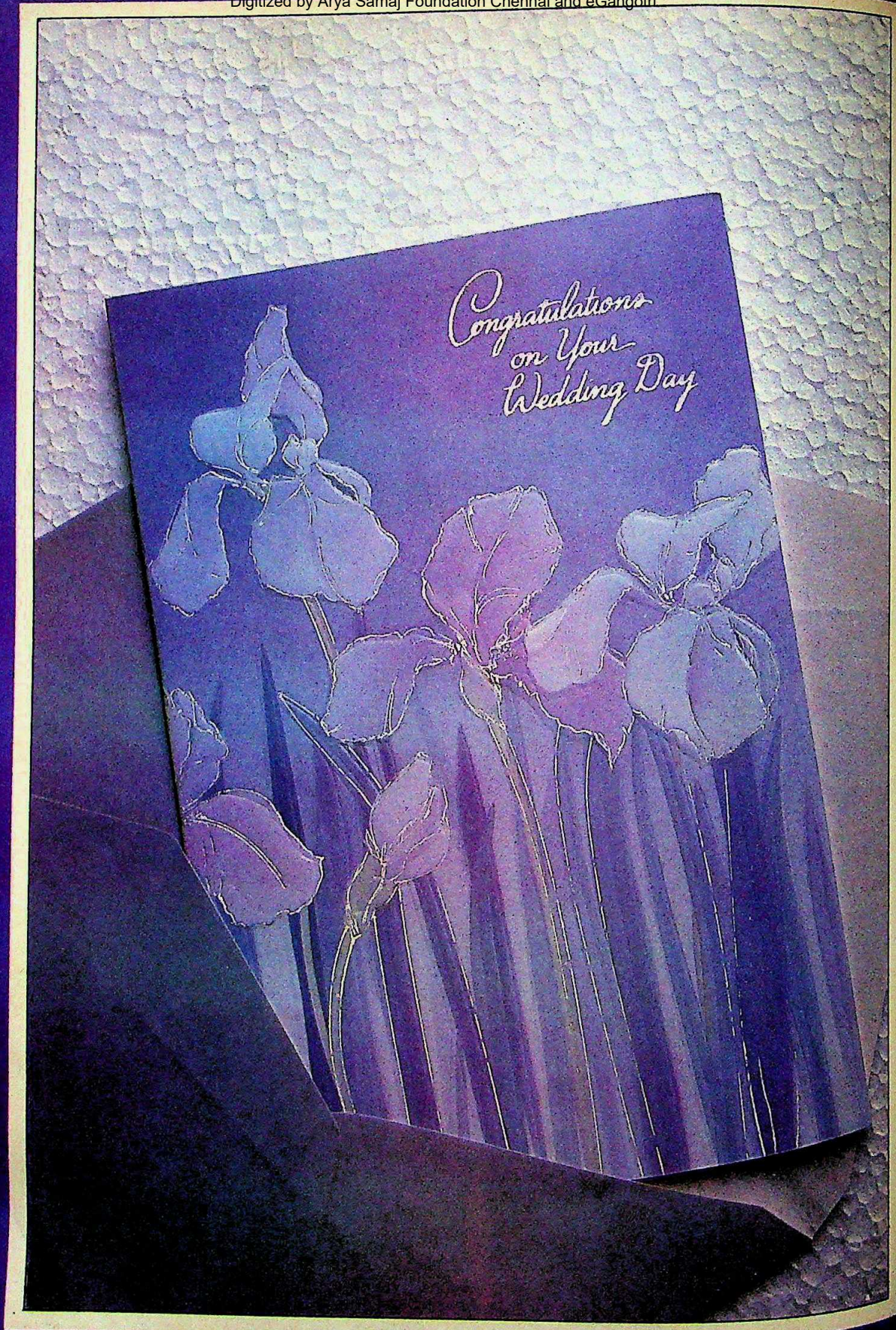

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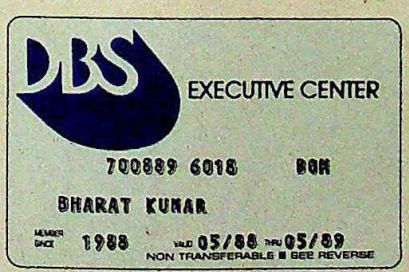

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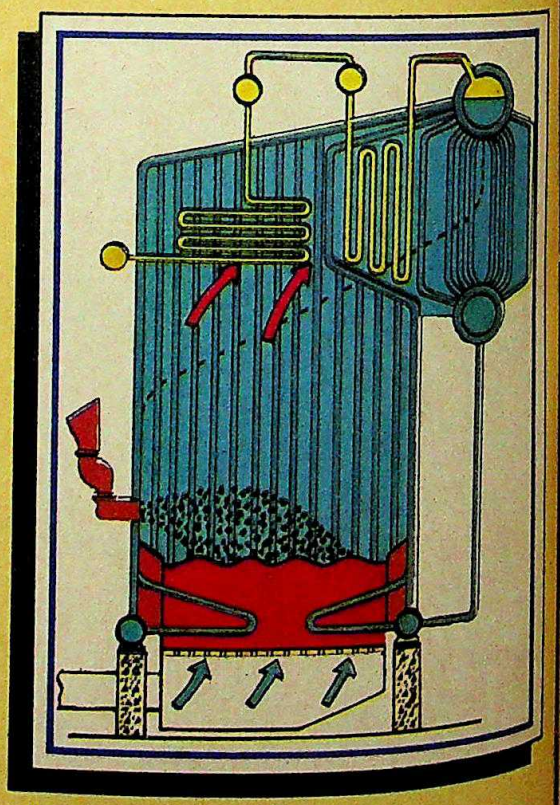

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THE HANDICAPPED

Getting their Due

Draft bill recommends reservation

Most advanced countries take special care of their handicapped people. In India, the handicapped are often left to the mercy of an uncaring society. But special laws are now on the anvil to ensure statutory protection and employment for the disabled. A draft bill prepared by the Ministry of Social Welfare—for introduction in Parliament during the ongoing winter session—incorporates many recommendations of the Baharul Islam Committee, which had suggested in its report submitted on June 30 that the Constitution be amended to reserve the following for handicapped people:

- Four per cent of government jobs at all levels.
- Four per cent jobs in all public sector units.
- Four per cent jobs in all private sector units with more than 100 employees.
- Three per cent executive jobs in all private sector establishments with over 100 employees.
- Four per cent seats in all government colleges and schools.

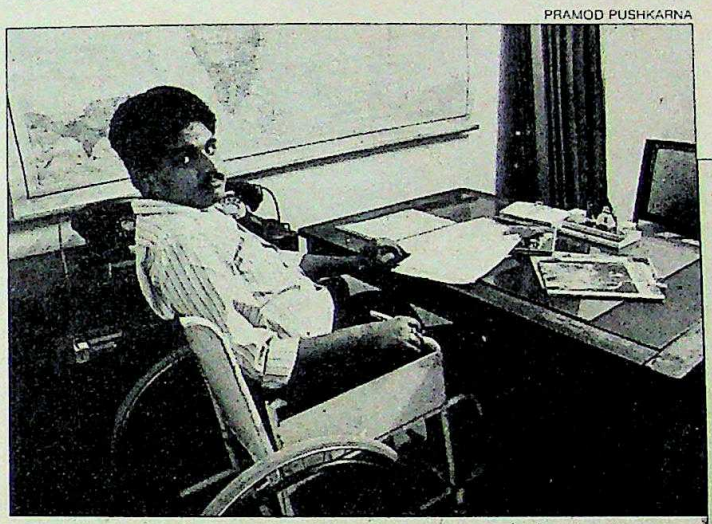
The committee further recommended that welfare of the handicapped be brought under the concurrent list (it is presently on the state list) and retirement age for them be extended by five years. "We have asked the Government to take particular care of children in the pre natal, peri natal and post natal phases, as most persons get handicapped during pregnancy or in early childhood due to lack of protien, iodine and proper medical care," Islam, a retired judge of the Supreme Court, told INDIA TODAY.

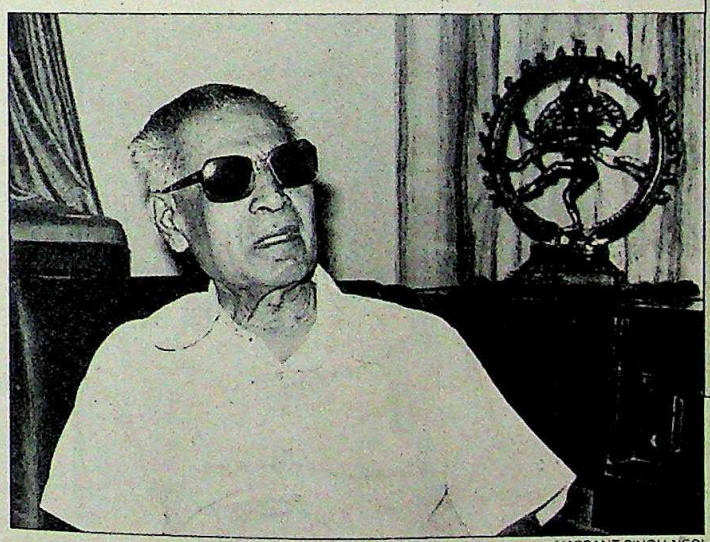
The presence of such provisions in the statute book will make it easier for deserving handicapped persons to receive their due. Fighting disablement is a lonely battle. "Your world collapses around you," says Vikram Dutt, 37, a former Delhi state basketball player and later coach for the Delhi team. Dutt used meditation and will power to fight his way back to near normalcy after being crippled from the waist down by a spinal injury. For him and many others, it is important to stand on their own feet to regain self-confidence and shed dependence on others. Just as 28-year-old Sanjay Bhatnagar did, clawing his way up from despondency to a class one officer's job in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, showing no less grit and determination than the legendary Sudha Chandran who danced to fame on an artificial leg.

Bhatnagar finds it easy to smile these days as he surveys, from his wheelchair perch, the new privileged world that has opened up before him. But it wasn't always so. The struggle was hard and demanding and included unexpected hurdles that a mindless bureaucracy often places in the path of handicapped people. Stricken with muscular dystrophy from childhood, he plunged into studies to outperform classmates who would push him around. "It was a question of proving myself, first to others and then to myself."

He managed to do that, and more. After graduating from Delhi University he first ran a little shop, then worked as an assistant in the Lok Sabha and later, the Ministry of External Affairs. Bhatnagar ran into his first serious road-block after he passed an examination to select probationary officers for the State Bank of India. The bank posted him to Bhopal, but Bhatnagar pleaded that in view of his disability, he be allowed to stay on in Delhi. The bank responded by cancelling his appointment. He challenged the dismissal but the high court rejected his appeal. Undeterred, Bhatnagar returned

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA





YASBANT SINGH NEGI

"I was lucky. Not everyone is," says Sanjay Bhatnagar, the first handicapped person to be appointed a class one officer.

"If you lose one faculty, God has given others which compensate," says Dr R. Nigam, who taught surgery for 15 years after losing his eyesight.

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to his job in the External Affairs Ministry and took the examination for the IAS. Again he was selected, putting the Ministry of Personnel in a fix as there was no precedent for appointing a disabled person as a class one officer. He appealed to Margaret Alva, the minister of state for youth and sports. Alva had a word with the Minister of State for Personnel P. Chidambaram, who ordered that a suitable desk job be found for Bhatnagar. Today Bhatnagar sits in a seventh floor room at the Press Information Bureau where he is designated assistant information officer.

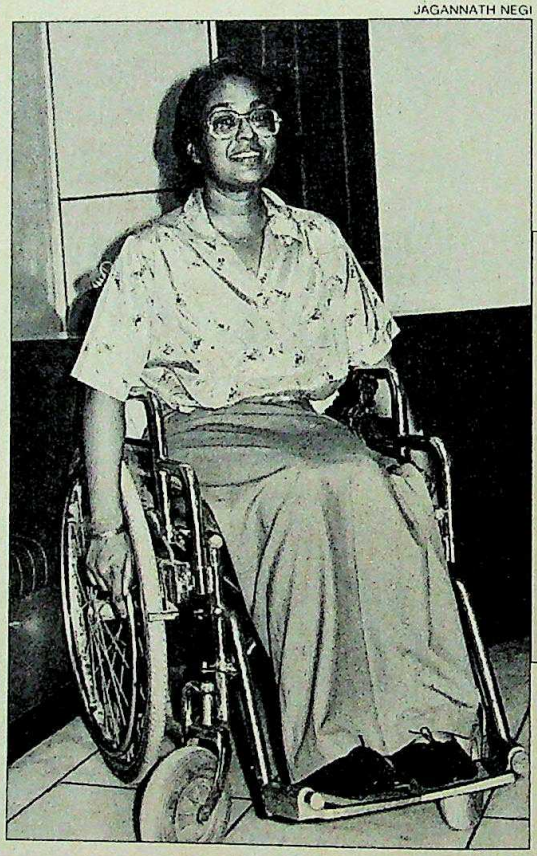
"I was lucky", Bhatnagar says modestly. "I come from an educated family. My mother is a schoolteacher and my father retired as a deputy secretary in the Government. But for other people life is not so simple". It wasn't, for M. Rajeshwara Rao, a handicapped administrative officer in the Reserve Bank of India, who qualified for the IAS in 1984. The Ministry of Personnel, however, at that time took the view that a seriously handicapped person could not enter the IAS or customs, Rao's second choice, as they involved field postings. Rao was offered a desk job in the Audit and Accounts Service, which he refused. "There is no thinking on the part of the Government to review the physical standards required for the IAS, IPS and customs," said an official of the Personnel Ministry.

RAO took the matter up to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. That prompted the Government to set up the committee headed by Baharul Islam. Referring to cases like Rao, the Minister of State for Social Welfare Rajendra Kumari Bajpai says the Government will have to categorise types and degrees of handicap to enable them to get worthwhile jobs.

At present, concessions are made for handicapped persons only in class three and class four jobs. Chidambaram favours some concessions for them in class two jobs, but there is bureaucratic opposition. Let alone jobs, there is no agreement even on the number of handicapped persons in the country. Bajpai says the 1981 census lists the number of handicapped people at 12 million, but according to Surrendar Saini, a member of the Baharul Islam Committee and president of the All India Federation of the Deaf, the figure would be nearer 80 million, or 10 per cent of the population. "The Government hesitates to accept this figure because it represents a big chunk of the population," says Saini.

Jobs and vocational rehabilitation clearly remain the most crucial needs of the handicapped. "The Government says a lot of things but hardly any jobs are available," complains Dr R Nigam, former professor of surgery at Delhi's Maulana Azad Medical College. "If someone has lost one faculty, that does not mean he is completely handicapped. God has given him other faculties which allow him to compensate for his disability," says Nigam, who certainly is an outstanding example of a person who did not allow visual impairment to curtail his professional career. Nigam lost his eyesight in 1963 but he continued teaching surgery for 15 years till 1978. Even a double amputee, who has lost both legs, is for most practical purposes a complete person. So why should he be denied a job, asks Nigam.

JAGANNATH NEGI



Getting employment is only half the problem. Getting a fair deal in the matter of promotions is the other half, as Chandra Rama Rao discovered to her distress recently. A paraplegic since her school days—she injured her spine in a fall while sleep-walking—Chandra qualified as a chartered accountant and joined the Central Bank of India as an internal auditor in 1971. Confinement to a wheelchair did not prevent her from undertaking arduous tours and she rose to become chief manager. But in July 1987 she was denied promotion to assistant general manager and the bank Chairman M.N. Goiporia told her she was not selected because her mobility was in doubt. "I told him I had done everything every other manager had done and more." Ultimately she resigned. "I could have fought and got my promotion but that meant fighting for every subsequent promotion." She did not think it was worth the trouble. "She is less handicapped than her fat colleagues who have hypertension and heart disease," says her sister Dr Shakuntala Dawesar. But fortunately for Chandra, her case was highlighted by a newspaper and came to the notice of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Chidambaram. "There is no reason Chandra Rao should not have been promoted if she was otherwise fit," said S.N. Menon, joint secretary in the Social Welfare Ministry. Chidambaram, on his part, sought an explanation from the bank and, not satisfied with the reply, referred the case to the director of public grievances in the cabinet secretariat, an ombudsman-like officer whose recommendations are normally binding on the Government.

> "I could have fought and got my promotion but that meant fighting for every subsequent promotion," says Chandra Rao, a bank employee.

So Chandra Rao could get her promotion after all. Her experience, and that of Rajeswara Rao and Sanjay Bhatnagar, proves that whenever the handicapped have the will, the Government has to help find them a way.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

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PRESSMAN

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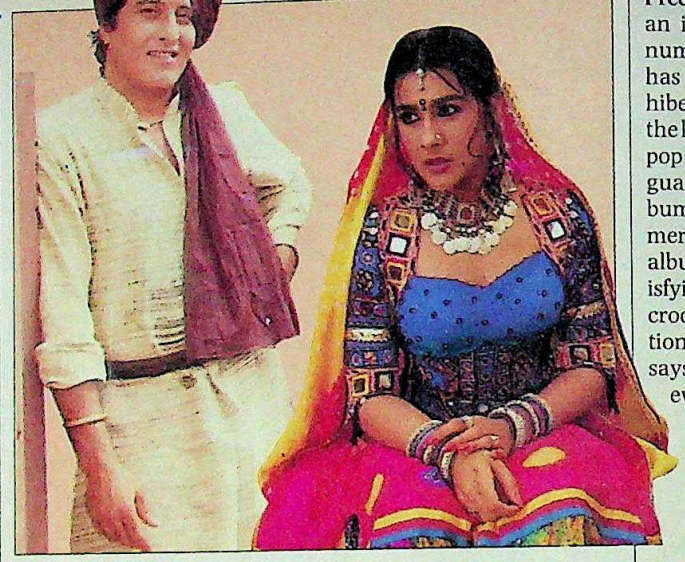
◆ The macho man of filmland broke a lot of hearts last week. He's gone and filed papers at the Registrar of Marriages in Bombay. **Vinod Khanna**'s, lucky bride-to-be: **Amrita Singh**, 23, of the mannish good looks and *Mard* fame. "Yes, we will be getting married in the next three months," she confirms happily. "We've known each other for a whole year now." For the *Dayavan* don, 42, who's been married before, once bitten is evidently not twice shy.

BHAWAN SINGH



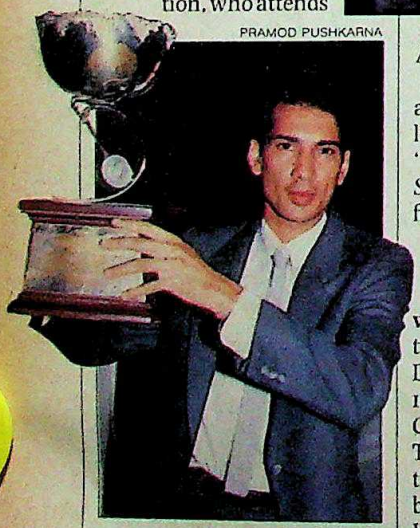
Khanna and Singh: getting married

◆ He's a regular film fiend, watching so many films, he can't remember the last one he saw. But now, **Navin Chaudhary**'s become a star himself. Making his debut in *Madame Sousatzka*, directed by John Schlesinger, the 16-year-old plays a piano prodigy to perfection. For a person who'd never touched a keyboard in his life, that was no mean feat. Acting opposite big timers, Shirley Maclaine and our very own Shabana Azmi, who plays his mother, Navin's drawn rave reactions in Washington where the film was premiered. "I'm glad I'm not a star with my friends though," says the young sensation, who attends a school in Bristol. Now he's looking forward to being in "Dilli" when *Madame Sousatzka* comes for the Indian film festival.

SIMON MEIN

Azmi and Navin: perfect key

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Malik: squashing success

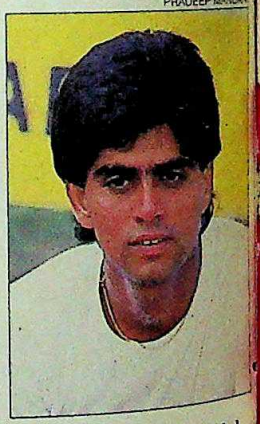
◆ Who said he's unsquashable? Last week, **Ravinder Malik**, 26, humbled national champ Meherwan Daruvala, 25, at the Fourth INDIA TODAY Masters Squash Championship in New Delhi. Two down and seemingly on the way out, Malik bounced back in inspiring fashion. With his army colleagues cheering lustily, he drew level with Daruvala. Several still thought the defending champion would pull out the shots to retain his title. But Malik was not to be denied, and he reeled off the fifth game without demur. "He was good," conceded the new champ. "But I was confident of winning." As for the Rs 10,000 prize money, he's not made any plans so far. "For me, it's the game that matters," said the squash freak.

◆ The Julie girl's back with a bang, or rather, *With Love*. **Preeti Sagar**—who became an instant hit with her first number, *My heart is beating*—has finally stepped out of hibernation and straight into the limelight. Belting out eight pop numbers in 11 Indian languages, Sagar's brand-new album is a golden sell out. Commercial success apart, the album has been extremely satisfying for the husky-voiced crooner. "This is my contribution to national integration," says she. "I've proved that even though the languages may be different, our culture is essentially the same."

Sagar: pop integration

◆ Annsfield Plain bowled **Raju Kulkarni**, 26, an unplayable bouncer. The club sent him a telegram terminating his £ 5,000 contract for the coming season in the Durham League in New

PRADEEP MANDAN



Kulkarni: clean bowled

Castle. Kulkarni paid for what he did not do. The telegram read: "Agreement cancelled because of Indian Government's refusal to grant visas to all England players."

Said the clean-bowled Kulkarni: "It's unfortunate this happened. But I guess it involves government policy." Another 25 Indians playing in England—who earn more playing one season there than an entire year in India—may be reverted to the pavilion likewise. Even if there is a second innings, no one's sure when play will begin.

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'ew Challenge

sults of the Pakistan general elec- arly indicated that Benazir Bhutto nly contender for prime minister. By the announcement President Ishaq olonged the mystery and drama. For , a new challenge lies ahead.

'ER STORY 42

Battle of the Bilge

Bofors has once again taken centre-stage as the crucial election issue. But instead of the thunder of facts and the parrying of debate, all that has been visible on the national stage is lunatic mudslinging by politicos who have the manners and language of guttersnipes.

SPECIAL REPORTS 20

A Vote for Peace

The trouble-free conduct of elections to the Provincial Assembly of the three eastern districts of Sri Lanka was a major step in the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. It silenced the alarmists and sowed the seeds for a Tamil-led government.

NEIGHBOURS 50

The Maharajah's Travails

The sweeping reforms initiated by the lent Managing Director of Air-India aipn Jetley, sparked off a seven-week agita- An uneasy truce has now taken effect, ou. art-time Chairman Ratan Tata and the old-timers continue to resent Jetley's style.

AVIATION 81

Vulnerability in the Skies

With the accident rate of the Indian Air Force reaching alarming proportions—five fighters crashing within 10 days—questions are now being raised about the quality, maintenance and handling of the aircraft. An in-depth report.

DEFENCE 78

Teeny-bopper Heart-throb

Ever since the film *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* was released, Aamir Khan, 23, has become a teenage sensation. He is the dreamboat of a new generation of kids—the cute guy next door who gives giggly 14-year-old schoolgirls goose pimples.

CINEMA 84

ONTENTS

OMMENT 7
ITALOOK 8
ES 9
ANOTES 10
E FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 13
CIAL REPORTS
o-Soviet Relations: A Subtle Shift 14
onal Politics:
ie Battle of the Bilge 20
al Tragedy:
ages of Bungling 24
la: Troubled Times 28
ENOTES 31
RRENT EVENTS
he Opposition: Divided They Stand 32
har: Secular Act 34
har: Transfer Spree 35
mil Nadu: Counter Attack 36
arnataka: Bommai Wins 37
daryana: Killing Fields 38
Haryana: Controversy over a Death 39
COVER STORY
Benazir Bhutto: The New Challenge 42

NEIGHBOURS
Sri Lanka: A Vote for Peace 50
TRADE WINDS 53
BUSINESS
DCM: An Empire Divided 54
HCL: Taking on Goliath 57
Marketing Fairs:
Games Companies Play 58
Bata: Dramatic Deal 59
Soft Drinks: The New Fizz 61
Ennore Foundries: Strange Switch 61
Multinationals: Foreign Faces 62
Oilseeds: Glut Gloom 63
Credit Cards: New Entrants 65
BUSINESSNOTES 66
The Markets: Shooting Up 67
SPECIAL FEATURE
Bombay: Manhattan Syndrome 68
SCIENCE
Atomic Energy:
A Nuclear Bear Hug 74
SPORTS
P.T. Usha: Idol Bashing Time 77

DEFENCE
Indian Air Force:
Vulnerability in the Skies 78
AVIATION
Air-India:
The Maharaja's Travails 81
CINEMA
Aamir Khan:
Teeny-bopper Heart-throb 84
DEVELOPMENT
Andhra Pradesh:
A New Bag of Tricks 86
ENVIRONMENT
Nainital: Sliding Downhill 88
HEALTH
Family Planning: Inhuman Operation 90
BOOKS
Ode to Nehru 92
Nixon Doctrine 93
EYE-CATCHERS 96

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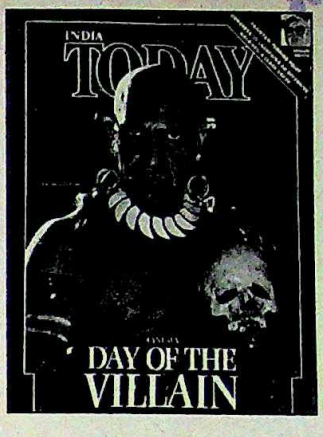

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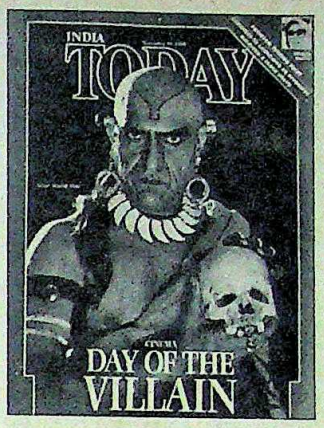

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New Delhi — L.R. MOXAM
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CASTING ASPERSIONS

With reference to your extract on Azad papers ("Painful Disclosure", November 15) I would like to say that Maulana Azad was indeed shrewd enough to leave behind a one-sided personal view of a situation in a sealed cover to be opened after 30 years so that there can be no rebuttal/explanation.

Bhopal — MEHAR-UN-NISSA AKHTAR

■ It is quite interesting to read Maulana Azad's *India Wins Freedom* and M.J. Akbar's *Nehru: The Making of India* in the same issue. If these articles are read at the same time doubts arise whether the versions about Azad's opinion of Nehru and Sardar Patel can be believed. He may not be correct on certain points about Nehru and Patel.

Madras — K.V. RAJAGOPALAN

■ After going through the extracts of the Azad papers one is inclined to think that freedom was not won by us but it was bestowed by the Britishers. According to him the factors responsible for accepting India's freedom on partition basis was the personality of Lady Mountbatten, with whom Nehru was in love.

Kolhapur — TATYA TENDULKAR

■ The papers reveal certain weaknesses among the rank and file of Congress in the last phase of the freedom struggle. It also compels us to reconsider the role of the great personalities of both the Muslim League and the Congress that led to partition.

Patna — SANJAY KUMAR GUPTA

TAKING SIDES

In his book on Nehru ("Nehru's Magic", November 15) M.J. Akbar has placed the late prime minister like some golden idol upon a lofty pedestal which the Azad papers now threaten to demolish. The hero worship of Nehru by Akbar might have been more believable as an honest opinion if the author had not become such a seditious courtier of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Bangalore — G.S. CHANDY

■ In his biography on Jawaharlal Nehru the author, M.J. Akbar, need not have taken cudgels on Nehru's behalf about preventing balkanisation of India according to a secret British plan.

Akbar could also have avoided all the drama he made about searching out documents from the British secret files, a hackneyed thing used by Indian politicians to blame the British for all our evils, when actually we are to be blamed.

Bombay — SHALIL GHOSH

■ In the extracts from M.J. Akbar's forthcoming book, there is a passing reference to the late V.P. Menon as "the ICS (Indian Civil Service) officer".

It is clear that Akbar is not on sure ground. Menon, though arguably one of the most brilliant Indian officers by any standards, was not even a matriculate, let alone a member of the Indian Civil Service.

Madras — SREEKUMAR G.

BEGGING TO DISAGREE

In his article on Doordarshan news ("The Bad News", November 15) I wonder why Nihal Singh has failed to include Usha Albuquerque and S. Tejeshwar Singh along with Rini Simon and Komal G.B. Singh. The latter only show how they can speak English well without caring even a bit about what they are actually presenting to the people who are watching them.

Bareilly — S.M. SAXENA

■ I do not agree with the views of Nihal Singh. I do not understand how he places Rini Simon on the top rung of the ladder. Her opening sentence is invariably comic as well as contradictory. 'welcome to the news' is read by her as 'wull cum'. The use of the word welcome in relation to news is a contradiction since news is good as well as bad.

Batala — B.D. BHANDARI

CHANGE IN NAME

In your articles ("The Stalking Game", September 30) and ("An Expensive Ritual", October 15) some inaccuracies have crept in in your reference to our company IEL Limited. It is no longer known as Indian Explosives Limited. As this name did not fully reflect the multi-product nature of the company's business, it was changed to IEL Limited in July 1985.

Jahar Sengupta is chairman of the company, and not president as mentioned by you and Phillip Daubeney is managing director and not chairman.

Bombay — N. LALJANI, IEL Limited

ATTENTION PLEASE

Your special column ("Din of Disasters", November 15) states that Rajiv Gandhi addressed a rally at Delhi's Boat Club on October 31, 1988. Actually, he addressed the gathering at Red Fort on that day.

Hyderabad — S.C. MAHANTI

■ This refers to the piece in the column Capitalook ("Five-Star Bureaucrats", November 15). Actually an official dinner was hosted by the department in honour of the visiting delegates to a SAARC meeting on 'Women in Development'. This was a part of official diplomatic reciprocity offered to SAARC delegates, on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs. No funds meant for child development, as implied by the article, have been spent on this or on any other kind of "do" in any five-star hotel.

Delhi — NEELAM KAPUR
Information officer, Ministry of Human Resources Development

OUTRIGHT OFFER

What? The entire estate of Dr Bali, as detailed in your article ("A Test of Wills", November 15) valued at Rs 9.64 lakh?

I don't mind paying Rs 64.9 lakh for it!

London, UK — K. NATHAN

CRITICISM BLACKED OUT

While pursuing *glasnost* in Doordarshan, Bhaskar Ghosh was booted ("A Propaganda Ploy", October 31) out because he refused to sing somebody else's song.

Allahabad — SHAHID AMIR

A BETTER SOLUTION

Your article on family planning ("The Great Hoax", October 31) makes interesting reading but fails to come to grips with the main issues involved. It is weak on potential solutions. The family planning programme can do very little to make the social and economic environments more conducive for couples to be satisfied with small families. The overall responsibility for reducing the rate of population growth should be assigned to some other organisation which should be responsible for improving the social and economic conditions in the country.

New York — ANRUDH K. JAIN

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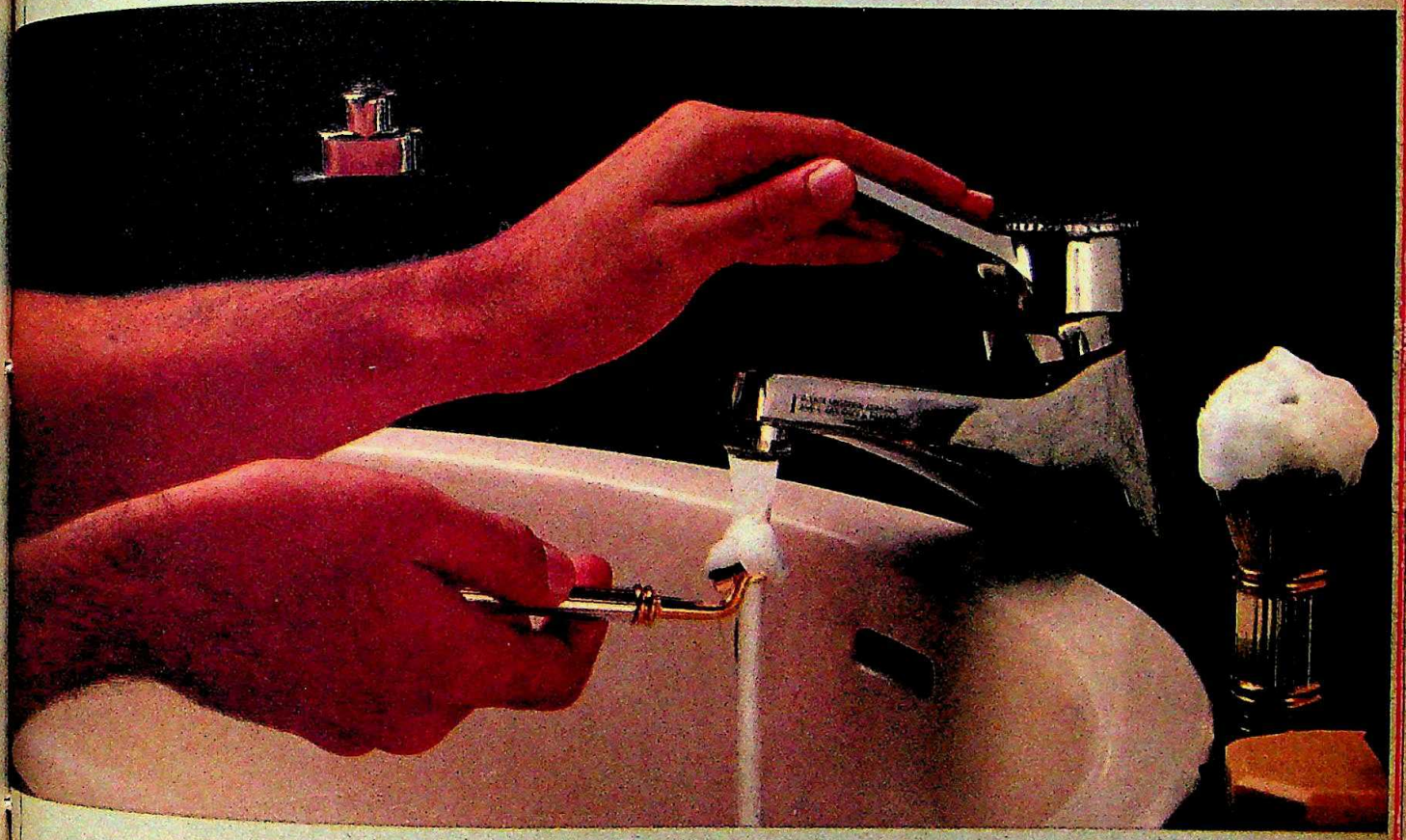

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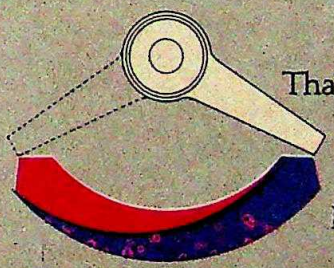

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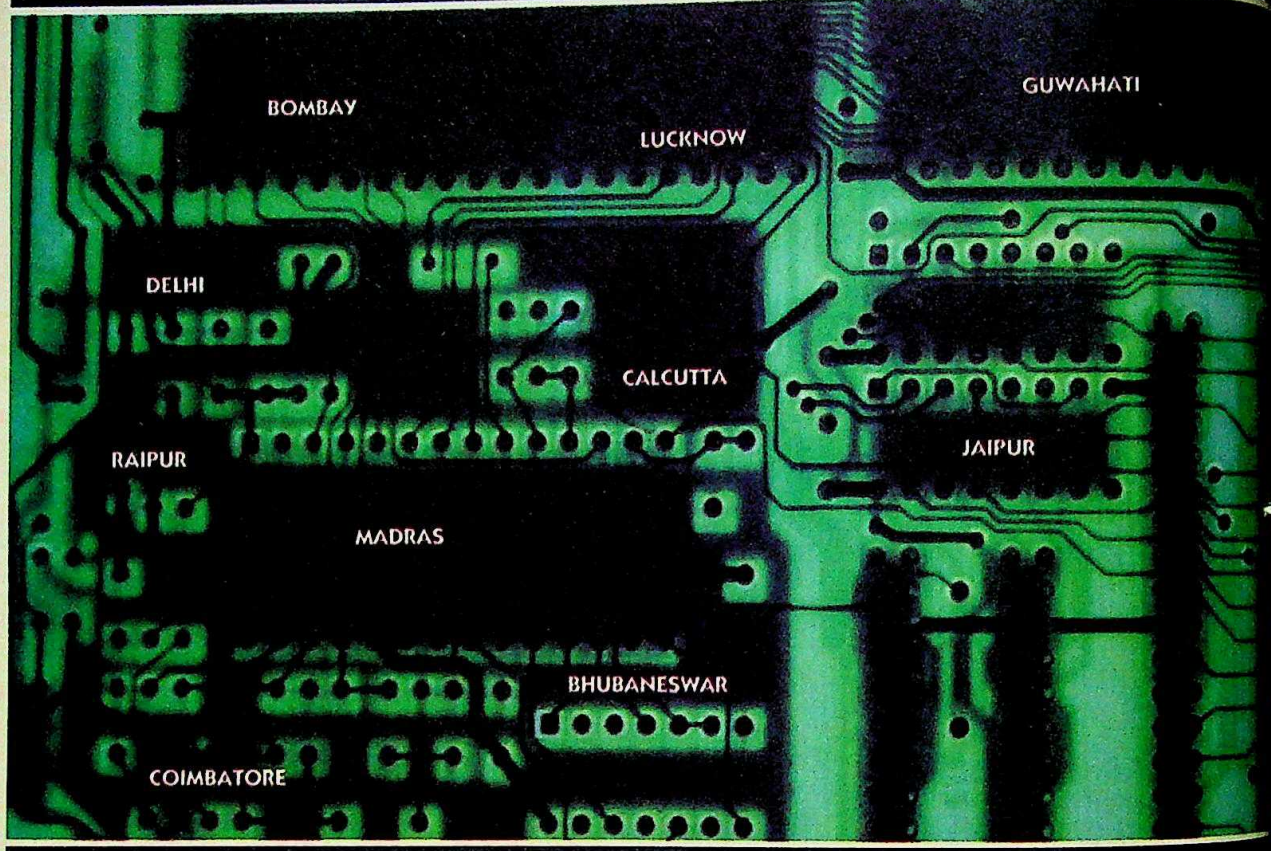

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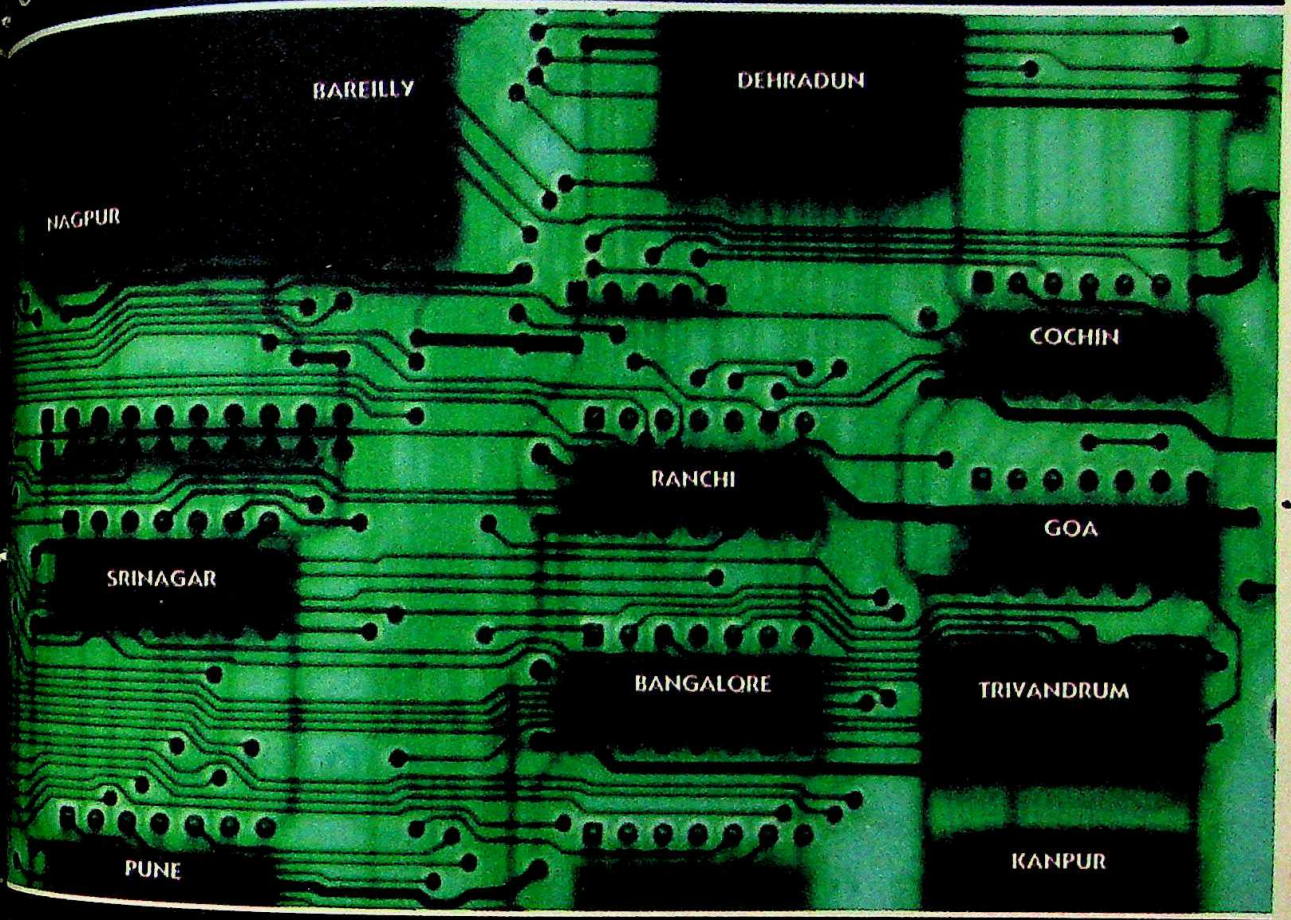

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PUNJAB

Demoralising Drift

If the Rajiv Gandhi Government has one blatantly obvious blind spot, it is Punjab. Last fortnight, President's Rule in Punjab was given its third extension—the only state to be so honoured. But that is also another overt indication of the Centre's lack of a viable Punjab policy. Apart from periodic and parrot-like assurances in Parliament—Minister of State for Home P. Chidambaram has once again assured the Lok Sabha that "despite set-backs" the state administration was intact and capable of fighting terrorism—the Government's off-hand attitude to Punjab smacks of criminal negligence.

Perhaps as a result of the Centre's inaction, Punjab has been relegated to the dark side of the public mind. That is where the real danger lies. The less the public awareness or interest in the Punjab tragedy, the less will be the Centre's resolve to tackle the crisis. However much has been written about Punjab, it bears some repetition if only because the single biggest challenge facing not just the Government but the entire country, is being left at the mercy of a handful of men whose capability is in serious doubt.

The state administration is not, as Chidambaram claims, intact. Nor has it displayed any superior qualities against terrorism in Punjab whose perpetrators continue to strike at will.

In this scenario, every bloody spectacle is dismissed as "a last desperate act of the killers who are on the run", and statistics simply lose their meaning. The truth, as Rajiv Gandhi admitted during his last visit to Punjab, is that both killings and government corruption are going up. These, ironically, were precisely the grounds on which the representative Barnala government was dismissed and President's Rule declared.

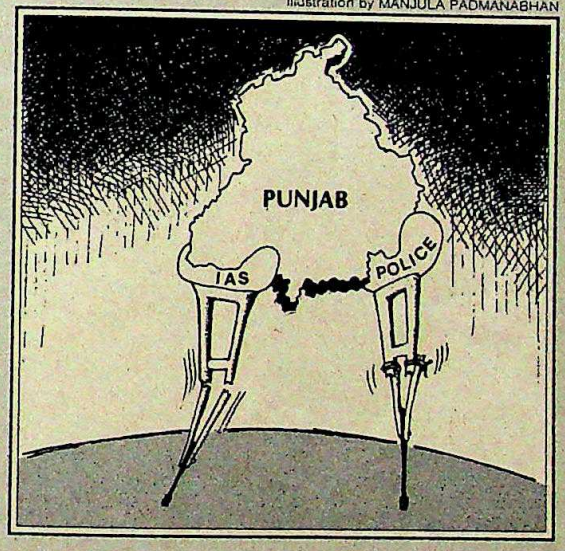
Punjab is now knotted in such complex patterns that a political solution, it seems, can only be a divine ordination. For the problem in Punjab has been compounded not only by a lack of human will but also by an absence of human vision. But even through the opacity that enshrouds Punjab's social and political landscape there glimmer bits of bitter truths which, if grasped for what they are, could provide the foundations for a more peaceful and enduring future in this sensitive state.

In a bizarre way, the actions of the terrorists as well as the short-sighted policies of the Government have produced a confluence of interests: one major purpose of terrorists is to make established political parties and processes irrelevant; under the Government's gameplan, too, parties and political processes have become irrelevant. Thus, there is the state on one side and the terrorists on the other with no real political or administrative institution in between to serve as a cushion.

In the absence of political life, the civilian and police wings of the Punjab administration should have been able to fill the void, even if partially. But both have suffered degrees of ruination. The Punjab Police has obviously not enjoyed the confidence of the Centre or else, why should all the police chiefs—P.S. Bhinder, Dhillon, J.F. Ribeiro and K.P.S. Gill—have been recruited from outside?

The vitiated administrative atmosphere has been further exacerbated by the Ribeiro-Gill rivalry in which the two barely speak to each other and officers are branded according to which camp they follow. Inspector general of police Chaman Lal's resignation over what he said were short-sighted policies of general repression has only increased the existing tensions.

Illustration by MANJULA PADMANABHAN



The civilian side barely fares better. As divisional commissioners and magistrates have regularly complained, the IAS and provincial services have virtually no say in running the state. And at the highest level the governor is unable even to find a suitable replacement for the retiring Chief Secretary R.P. Ojha for whom an unprecedented extension has reportedly been sought. Is Punjab's IAS cadre also bankrupt of leadership?

The state's seniormost bureaucrats have lived in uncertainty and many of the more prominent ones have been transferred outside Punjab or been shunted aside. The result is that their valuable experience and grassroots knowledge of local conditions and the local psyche have been lost. Outsiders can bring in a fresh approach to the problem but without the advice and insight of senior local administrators, they will be handicapped.

In Punjab today, the chasm between the truth as the administration sees it and as it is perceived by the people is so large that farmers stand ready to believe the absurd notion that the Government would deliberately flood parts of the state with the waters of Bhakra. The terrorists fed on this paranoia to kill a fine officer, Major-General B.N. Kumar of the Bhakra Board.

The credibility gap has never been as large and it is high time that the Centre reads the handwriting on the wall instead of the self-serving press releases issued by the public relations men of the state Government. Even in the absence of a political solution, it is high time for the Government to listen to differing points of view and to take serious measures to encourage and develop the civil and police leadership in the state without abandoning the rule of law and the democratic process. Otherwise, an already demoralised administration will teeter dangerously on the brink of total collapse.

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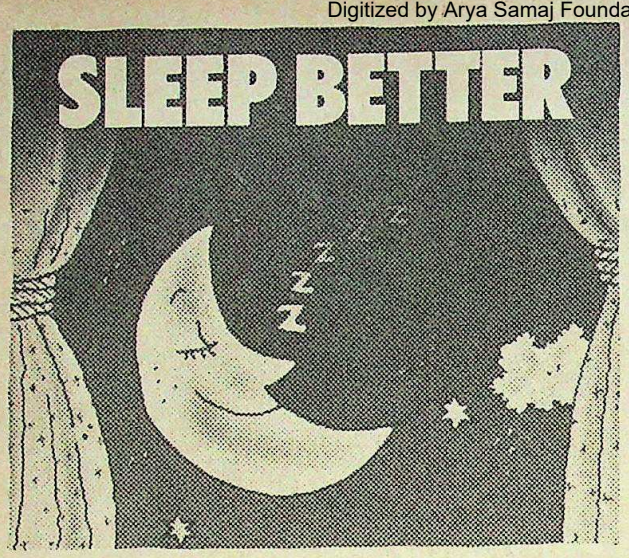

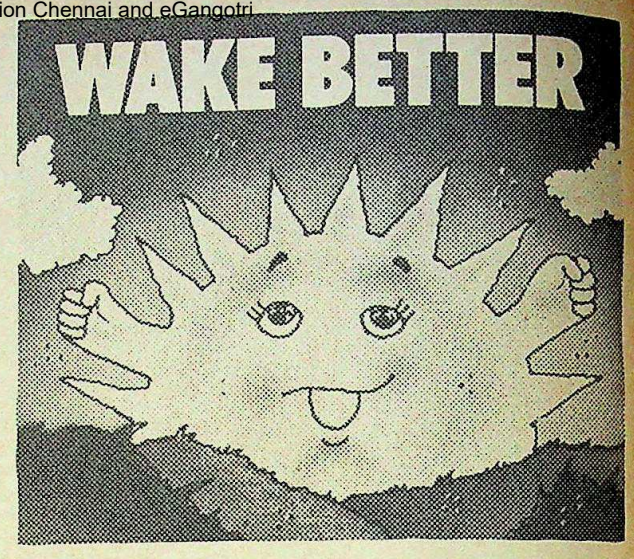

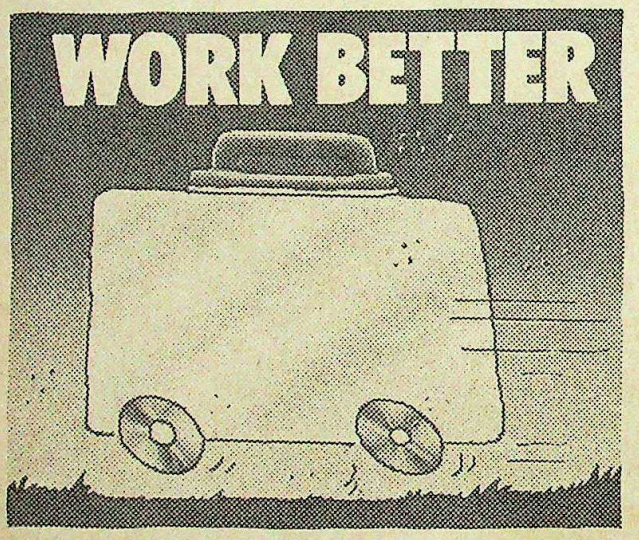

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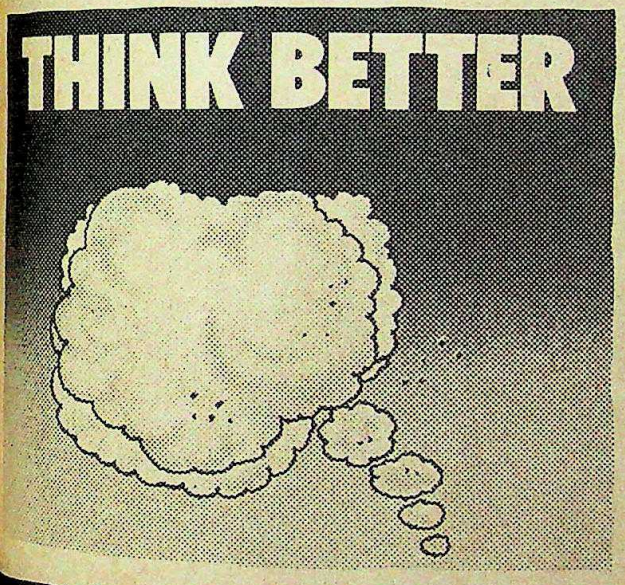

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Forced Silence

● The boisterous and usually foul-mouthed Rajya Sabha member Kalpnath Rai remained strangely silent during the recent Bofors debate in Parliament in which Vishwanath Pratap Singh was made the target for the choicest invective from Treasury Bench stalwarts like Buta

Singh, K.C. Pant and Vasant Sathe.

The silence was more imposed than voluntary. It turns out that the voluble Rai had had more than his say on Bofors on a previous occasion. He had been invited as a guest at the birthday celebration of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Narain Dutt Tiwari in Delhi. First, according to several guests who were present, Rai boasted that he was one of a handful of gutsy Uttar Pradesh Congressmen who had dared to come to the party while others had not showed up for fear of being identified as pro-Tiwari in the Tiwari-Bir Bahadur Singh rivalry that has riven the state.

Then came the Bofors bombshell. Why should the prime minister need to raise Rs 60-crore from international arms deals, asked an incredulous Rai, when Rs 200-crore could be raised from domestic sources at short notice by a single telephone call from any of his trusted aides? An embarrassed silence was the only answer Rai received for his more-loyal-than-thou eloquence.

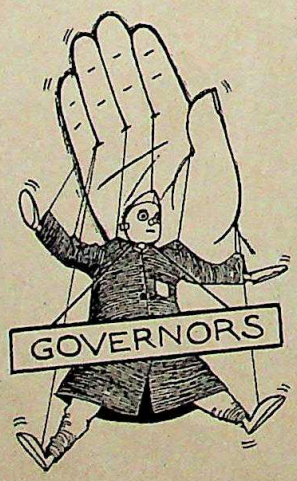
Calling the Shots

● When it comes to pulling out the stops against its opponents or those "who need to be taught a lesson," the ruling party doesn't even respect the essentially non-political role that governors are supposed to play. The word is out that they must be responsive to the diktats of New Delhi, or else...

Accordingly, in Kerala, Governor Ram Dulari Sinha has embarrassed the Nayanar Government by sitting on urgent appointments, such as those of university vice-chancellors, which must have her signature. And in Andhra, the cordial relations between Governor Kumudben Joshi and N.T. Rama Rao seem to have snapped overnight.

Joshi has delayed signing approval to the post of Lok Ayukta , an election promise

Cartoons by MANJULA PADMANABHAN



of NTR. Former chief justice of the Delhi High Court, R.N. Aggarwal, has been selected but will have to cool his heels till Joshi relents. The Congress(I) has firmly demonstrated that it can still call the shots in opposition states.

Shoe-String Sprees

● The year-long Soviet festival in India—capped by Gorbachev's visit—may have created considerable goodwill between the two countries. But several Russian performers left the country with a bitter taste in their mouth.

These entertainers—smitten by the spirit of *glasnost* and

perestroika—were heard remarking they found Indian officialdom stodgy and overly bureaucratic in matters such as arranging tours. But what really shocked them was Indian inflation.

Each performer was given hotel accommodation and Rs 200 per day for food—a mere pittance for those with more voracious appetites; and certainly insufficient to buy a decent dinner for two, with the customary bottle of vodka thrown in. As word about the inadequacy of the per diem allowance spread Russia-wards, troupes of performers began to bring bagloads of canned eatables with them.

And those with more economical appetites, wisely saved the money for spending sprees. They were seen indulging in last minute consumerist orgies , picking up goodies that are rare in the mother country—jackets, leather wear, pocket calculators, quartz watches, walkmans, and western pop music cassettes. Who says the nation's capital has nothing to offer to the developed world?

Lobbied Low

● Foreign office officials have been expressing unhappiness over the inability of the Indian Embassy in Washington to counter anti-Indian propaganda by Sikh separatist groups based abroad.

In recent weeks, these groups have succeeded in getting the United States Senate and the House of Representatives to pay attention to Sikh grievances in Punjab. A Congressional resolution even demanded Sikhs be guarded against persecution from the Indian Government.

But what really shocked South Block was a fiery speech in the House of Representatives by Dan Burton of Indiana, who declared that "Rajiv Gandhi should wake up and grant the Sikhs freedom".

What South Block now wants to know—and the em-

bassy has no answer for—is how a fringe group like the Washington-based Council of Khalistan can influence the US Congress while the Indian mission, with all the resources at its command, cannot get its point of view across.

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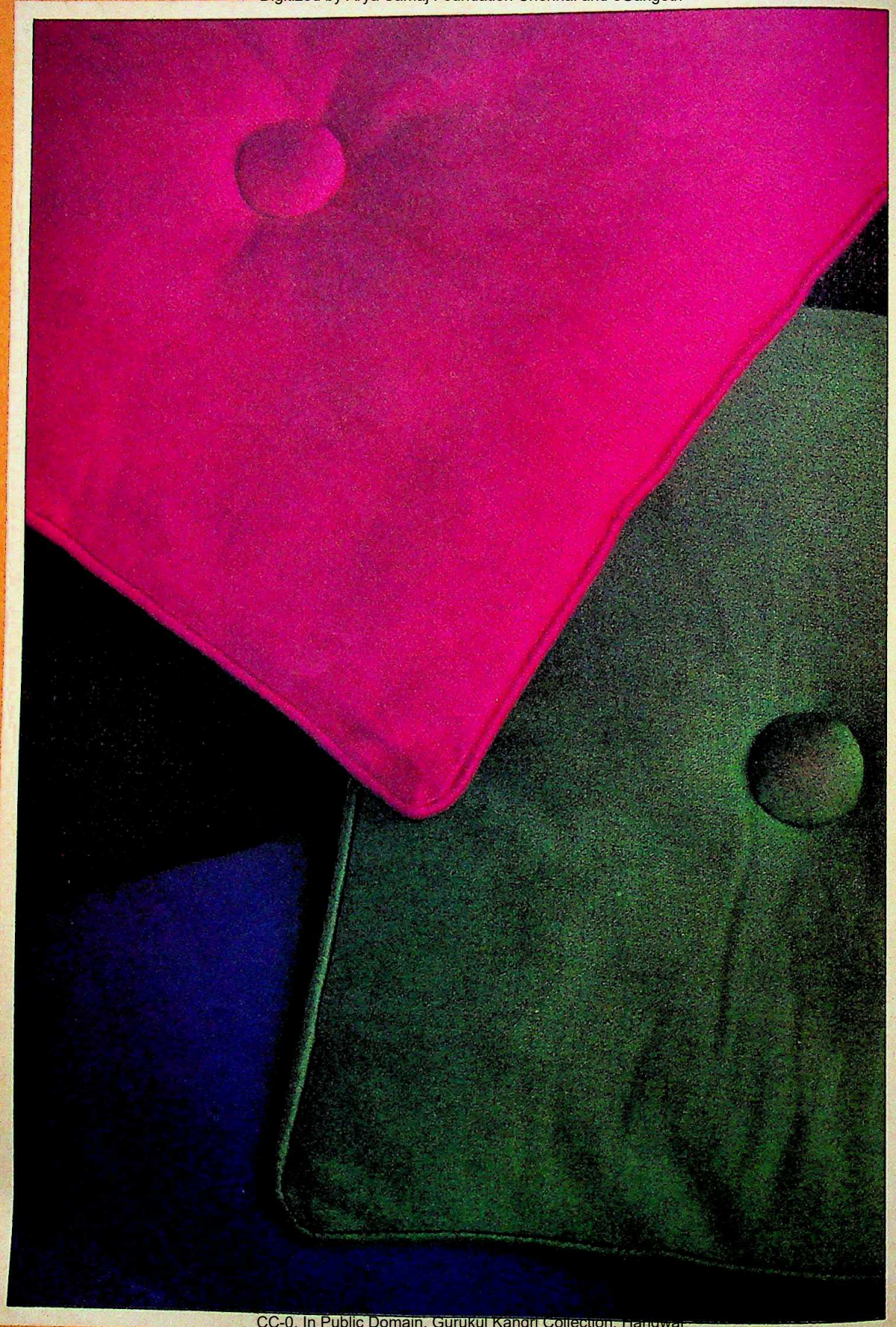

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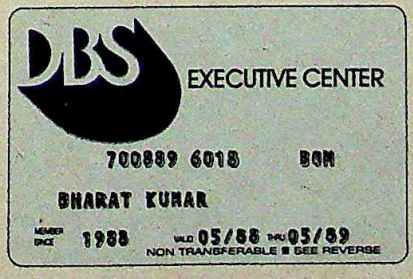

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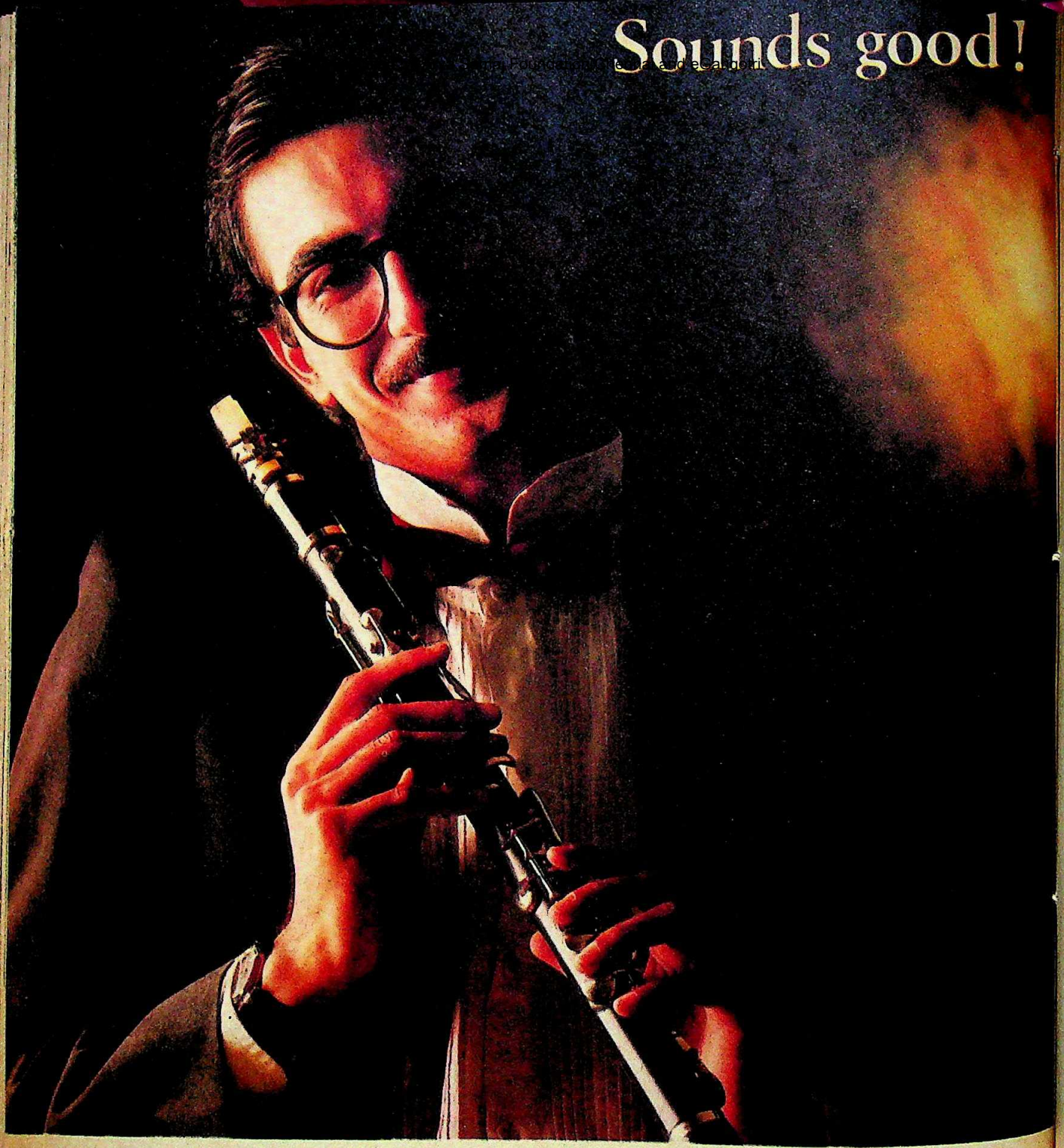

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The Times of India

• *I have made out sufficient ground for Mr V.P. Singh to take sanyas.*

■ K.C. PANT in Parliament

• *Who are they (the Congress) to ask me? They have swindled the country for 35 years and did not disclose their assets.*

■ N.T. RAMA RAO, on being asked to declare his assets

• *I have been all over the country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and found that nobody wants an alternative to the Congress(I).*

■ BUTA SINGH in *Indian Express*

• *We have seen prime ministers. We have seen liars. But we have never seen a prime minister who lies so much.*

■ P. UPENDRA, Telugu Desam leader, quoted in *The Times of India*

• *Rajivji, with folded hands I plead with you not to make any person number two in your Cabinet....Whoever occupies the number two chair just gets mentally deranged.*

■ VASANT SATHE at an AICC(I) session

• *She (Indira Gandhi) understood my loneliness at the top and I understood her loneliness. There was, therefore, a very unique relationship which I have been unable to feel with any other head of state.*

■ MARGARET THATCHER, British prime minister, in *India Abroad*

• *In trying to save President Jayewardene, they (the Indian prime minister and his advisors) seem to have destroyed him.* ■ Editorial comment in *The Statesman*

• *I don't believe in dynasties and I don't see a Bhutto dynasty.*

■ BENAZIR BHUTTO in *The Indian Post*

• *How can you talk of swimming pools when you don't have enough water in the bathtub?*

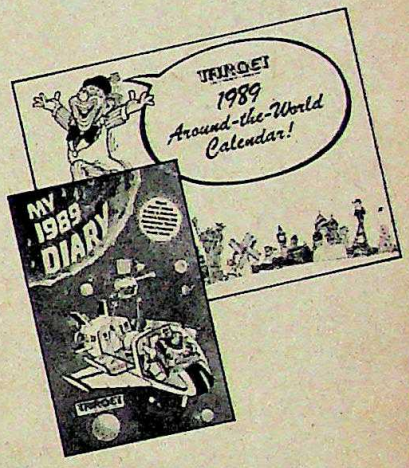
■ An Indian Airlines pilot, in response to Rajiv Gandhi's statement that pilots can afford to build personal swimming pools, in *Sunday Mail*

• *We welcome criticism in the press. But nothing should be done to create fear among passengers.* ■ RAHUL BAJAJ, Indian Airlines chairman, in *Business India*

• *What's wrong with one-night stands?....A man is bigamous by nature.*

■ JACKIE SHROFF in *Star & Style*

Yearlong gifts for your children



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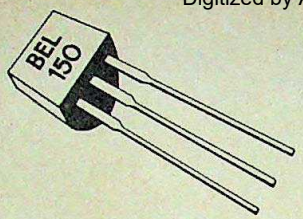

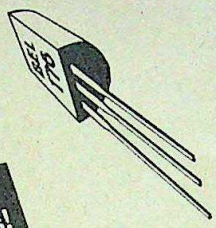

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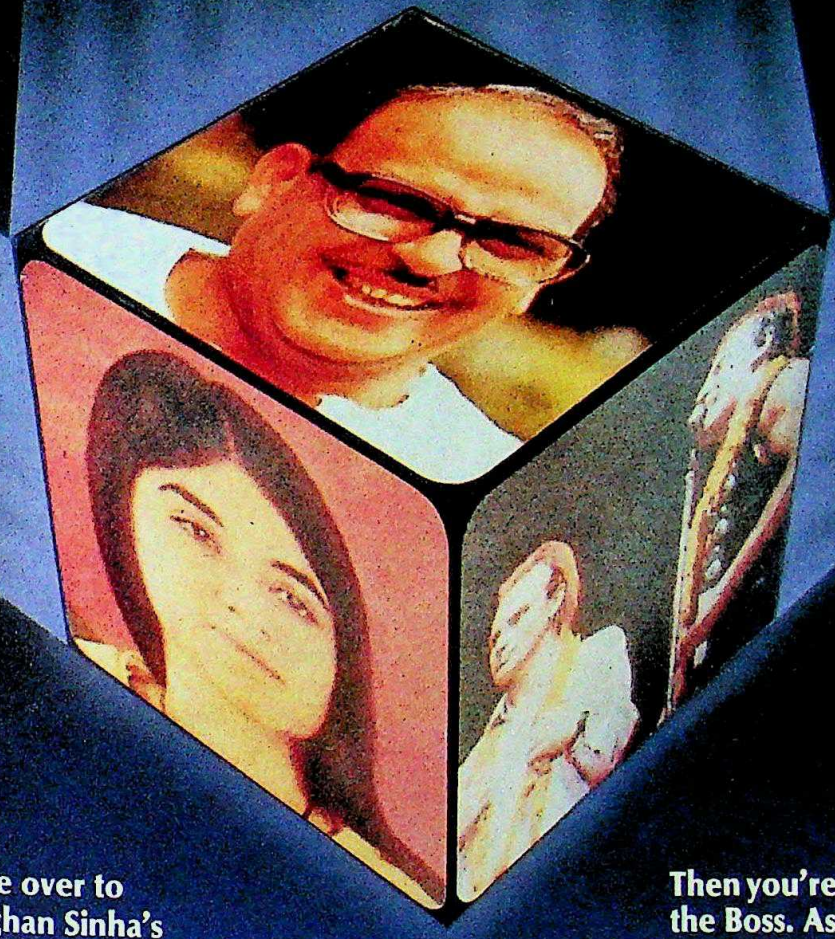
Come face to face with the enigmatic V.P. Singh while he talks of his feelings about Rajiv Gandhi.



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NEWSTRACK

The newsmagazine to watch

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Go Newstracking through India

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Newstrack, the country's first news magazine on video cassette spells excitement from the moment your press the 'play' button.

Never-before features that cover people, places, events, ideas, issues and trends will enthral you every month.

Every month *Newstrack* takes you behind the news and the newsmakers for your new insight into news.

The people who brought you India's most bold, incisive and complete newsmagazine now take you Newstracking through India.

Launched in Delhi in September, Newstracking has already become a popular habit. And now the rest of India can go Newstracking.

See what the September, October and November *Newstrack* had and you'll understand why.

September had a heady opening with V.P. Singh's eyes and gestures saying everything, the tears of the Women of Paradia, the undiluted charm of Shashi Kapoor, Ensemble — a fashion revue and lots more.

October was an eclectic mix covering the world of politics and entertainment. An incisive close-up of the Syed Modi murder mystery, R.K. Hegde in all his colours, the frank and free candour of Shatrughan Sinha besides film reviews and more.

November had Menaka Gandhi speaking out the return of the black sheep (Mukherjee, Antulay and S.C. Shukla), a heart rending look at Hijras and of course coverage of the show of the decade—The Human Rights Concert.

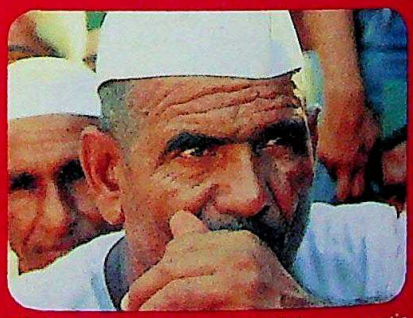
Now, the December Cassette awaits you. You can have it hand delivered or mailed instantly to you. There are three exciting offers covering single cassette, six and 12 months' subscriptions, details of which are given later. You can choose what you like.

You can also build your library of *Newstrack* and get at any time you want a complete picture of the important issues that changed the course of the country. You can also share your personal video library with your friends, neighbours or relatives and appreciate an experience too good for words.

A preview of the December NEWSTRACK

Who's got the loot? Bofors scandal: Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh trade charges and counter charges over the Bofors payments.

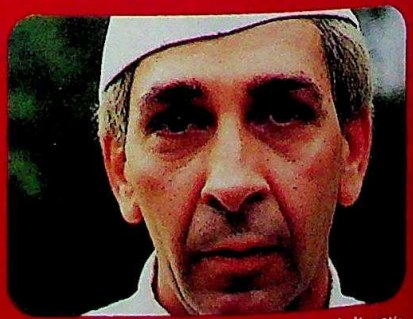
Benazir Bhutto: A candid interview with Pakistan's triumphant leader.



Tikait: An intimate portrait of the new rustic leader on the political horizon.

Destitute Homes: An aftercare home for women and children which is run like a medieval torture chamber.

D.C.M.: The closure of D.C.M's Bara Hindu Rao Complex is a Rs. 800 crore question enmeshed in politics.



Roshan Seth: Plays Nehru again and discovers India in the new serial Bharat Ek Khoj.

And more...

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(Opposite page 172)

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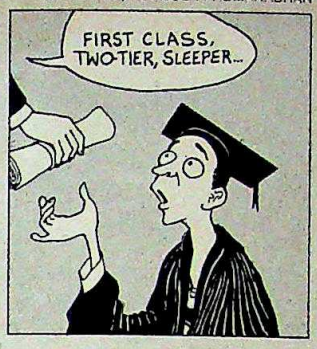
Cartoons by MANJULA PADMANABHAN

UNCLAIMED BUNDLE



■ Railway stations are known to house all sort of bric-a-brac, but often the contents of their goods can be very strange indeed. Recently 18 bundles were discovered lying at the Tatanagar railway station in Bihar. They had been unclaimed for a long time despite repeated reminders to the owners, Ranchi University.

The contents: uncorrected pre-degree and degree answer sheets for examinations held in 1983, 1984 and 1987 at Ranchi, Dhanbad, Jharia, Bokaro, Hazaribagh and Giridih, for which the results had already been announced. The papers had not been checked as the examiners had refused to do so.

The South Eastern Railway is now planning to auction the bundles if the university does not take steps to take charge of the goods after paying wharfage, demurrage and other charges. Which seems pretty unlikely: if results can be declared without recourse to them, what need of them now?

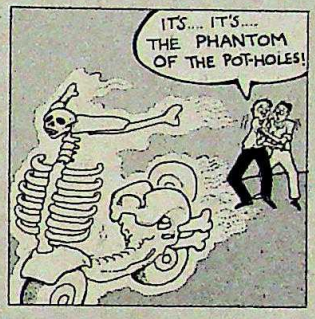
TEACHING CHEATING

■ Who says that the Bengali lacks the spirit of enterprise? One enterprising soul, going by the name of Geeta Pal, claims to have set up the Pal Tookli (copying) Tutorial Home at Phulla near Shantipur that specialises in teaching students the art of cheating in examinations.

Commuters travelling in trains from Sealdah station at Calcutta were recently handed leaflets advertising the agency. It promised training in copying "in a modern and scientific way" and urged students to enrol immediately as "seats are limited".

For good measure, the leaflets added that students who skip classes, dislike studies but still want to pass examinations could have all their problems solved if they enrolled for the seven-day course.

With Calcutta University having reduced education to a farce, wasn't it just a matter of time that cheating became institutionalised in the state?



NOVEL PASTIME

■ These days passing time has truly become a difficult task. Even protesting workers who refuse to work find it hard to just stay idle.

To show involvement they usually hold relay fasts, gate meetings, invite union leaders and politicians to speak. But that's at daytime. Night-time witnesses a different scene. A sort of entertain while you campaign.

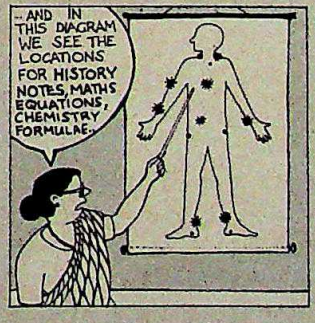
Recently, strikers at a newspaper office on Delhi's Bahadurshah Zafar Marg came up with a novel plan to make their vigil memorable. They hired a television and a VCR alongwith their favourite Hindi filmi cassettes. And while their counterparts inside the high-rise buildings clanged at newsprint, the 50-odd strikers, five cops and the itinerant movie addicts regaled themselves with the Bachchans and Sridevis of the world. After all isn't it self-defeating to bore yourself to death while at protest?

SOLEMN PROTEST

■ One thing the common man in India is good at, is inventing novel methods of registering protest at government inefficiency. In Pune recently he even resorted to drama and histrionics to prove his point.

Incensed with the attitude of the municipal corporation towards the state of the roads, a tonsured youth led an odd funeral procession through the city's streets. The departed soul being led to its last rite was the skeletal residue of a scooter—the victim of monsoon pot-holes in the roads.

Condolence was being offered by youth who performed skits to drive home the message. The final rites were performed according to laid down conventions right opposite the corporation building. To add appropriate solemnity to the occasion was a group of nine policemen. The one thing lacking, though, was a 21-gun salute.



ROYAL PRISONER

■ Police lock-ups always house far-fetched characters, but sometimes it appears no line at all is being drawn anywhere.

The residents of Shyampur village in Howrah district of West Bengal suddenly became aware of an intruder one night when birds in their poultry shed created a commotion. Investigation revealed the presence of an odd criminal—a Royal Bengal Tiger cub measuring three feet and nine inches. The blue blooded cat was nonchalantly helping himself to a fowl dinner.

The terrified villagers, however, gathered courage and managed to trap the feline intruder. Early next morning the local police swung into action and formally arrested the thief and took him into custody. And in true tradition, the prince of the jungle was accorded special red-carpet hospitality—a separate cell for himself.

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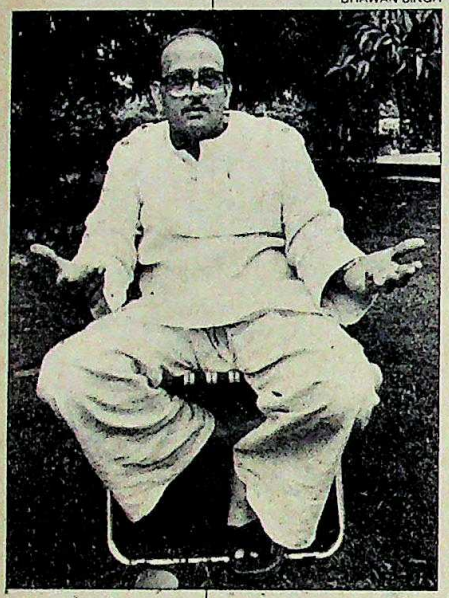
Dear Bharat,

I thought it was a good time to fill you in on the home front since so much seems to have happened during the fortnight that was. But funnily enough, after finishing the letter, I was left with the distinct impression that you may have heard it all before.

I seem to remember mentioning Bofors at some stage. Anyway, it is a Swedish howitzer that everyone here is gunning for. I also recall having mentioned Vishwanath Pratap Singh. He is the chap who makes charges at the drop of a brick. Well, he's dropped a big one this time. A brick, not a charge.

BHAWAN SINGH



V.P. Singh—the chap who makes charges at the drop of a brick—has dropped a big one this time. A brick, not a charge.

Actually the charge was pretty serious—accusing Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi directly of having skimmed off the Bofors cream. He produced some shop-soiled documents and claimed that the Lotus account into which some of the Bofors cream was siphoned was Rajiv's. The logic? Rajiv means lotus in Sanskrit.

You recall the pandemonium in Parliament the last time the Bofors scandal was resurrected. Well that was like a church service in comparison. The ruling party turned the benches on Singh in Parliament by accusing him of having a secret Swiss account under the name of Universal Traders. The logic? Vishwa translates into universe. Never mind the poor Indian public, the Swiss banks must be taking Sanskrit lessons to figure out which account belongs to whom.

Anyway, having dropped his firecracker, Singh charged off to tackle other fronts (you may remember them too, it is something vaguely resembling an opposition front). Well they are still in a familiar soup with a split in the Dal (Lok) and the farcical expulsion of one H.N. Bahuguna who says he is in the Opposition but behaves like a member of the ruling party.

You may also remember the great cultural revelation involving the Soviet Union and India. Well, Mr Gorbachev was back in Delhi for the grand finale—and to reassure Rajiv that Indo-Soviet friendship was alive and well and not living in Beijing. The outcome of the visit is that relations between the two countries, as the two leaders assured us, is now on an even higher plane. Any more such visits and it would be a stratospheric relationship. I think Raisa came along too but nobody seems very sure.

Mr Gorbachev was back in Delhi to reassure Rajiv that Indo-Soviet friendship was alive and well and not living in Beijing.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

At the risk of boring you too much I must add that other new developments that have taken place may also sound strangely familiar. Terrorists staged another massacre but the Government says that everything is under control. Indian Airlines went on strike and left thousands of passengers stranded (compared to a few hundred every day). Rajiv visited Amethi and announced that he would contest the next election from familiar ground. He also said that there will be no mid-term election but with his current credibilty problem nobody really believes him, least of all his own party.

Finally, the new news. Remember the anti-defection law? Well, for the first time, a member of Parliament has forfeited his seat because he quit the Congress(I) to join an opposition grouping. He may have been an obscure parliamentarian from the North-east but his ouster opens up intriguing possibilities. The next victim could well be V.P. Singh which would really set the pigeon among the cats.

As you can see, the Festival of India is coming to something of a climax even if we seem to be going around the same circles.

Yours familiarly

DILIP BOBB

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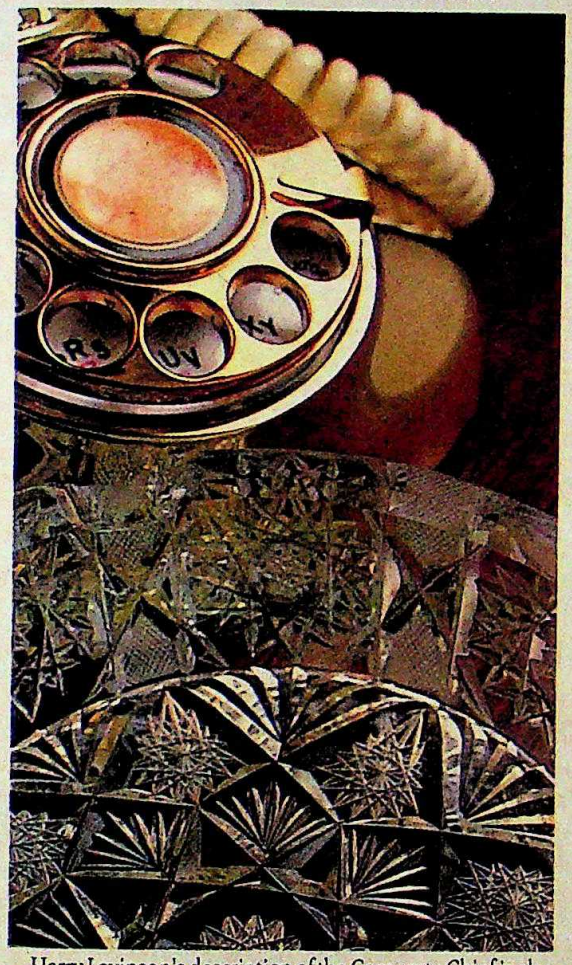
"He who acts on his own behalf is the master of himself, and his environment."



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For those in high places, a fabric that goes beyond distinction.

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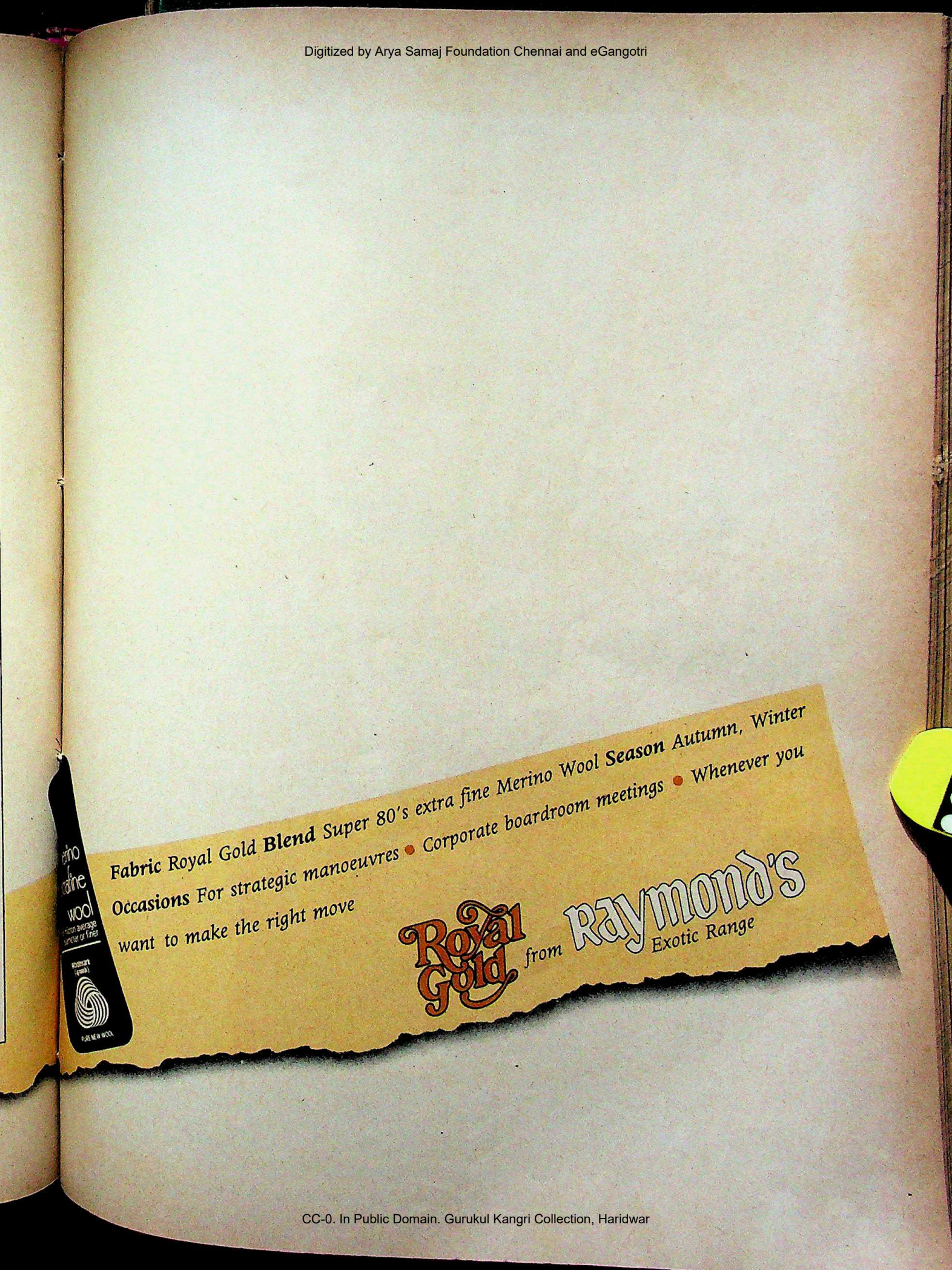

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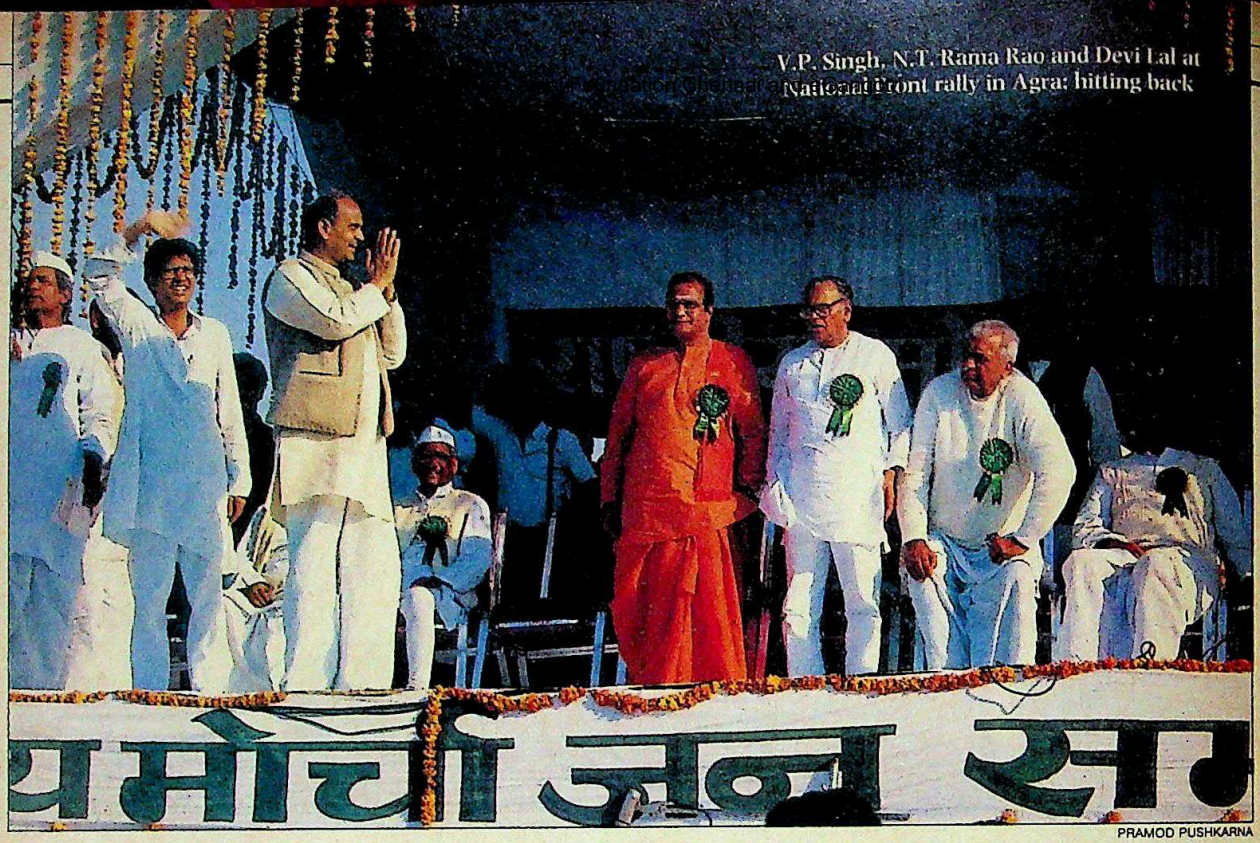

V.P. Singh, N.T. Rama Rao and Devi Lal at National Front rally in Agra: hitting back

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

NATIONAL POLITICS

Battle of the Bilge

The manners are those of unscrupulous street fighters, the language that of guttersnipes. As the luminaries of the Congress(I) and the Opposition muck-rake and trade filth in preparation for the general elections, it is clear beyond all doubt that the 1989 poll will rank as the basest ever.

DOWN, down, down plunged the level of democratic debate in the country as the national stage saw displayed on it a fortnight of venom and demagoguery perhaps unparalleled in the post-Independence political history of this land. The ugliness touched everyone—cabinet ministers, chief ministers, ordinary members of Parliament, and leaders of the Opposition. The mud that was slung throughout this period clung to the slender democratic institutions of the country like a poisonous grime. And in this mad mad melange of mudslinging, issue-based politics were sacrificed at the altar of personal vilification: the language of the gutter even found its way into Parliament where Congress(I) MPs used the august forum to hurl epithets like traitor, parasite, liar, insane at their opponents. And the Opposition responded in kind, especially at a well-attended rally of the National Front in Agra which resembled a gathering of street fighters rather than a respectable national alternative to the ruling party.

At stake was the Bofors issue. With the whiff of elections in the air, the Opposition, cashing in once again on newspaper reports published in *The Hindu* last June proving commissions were paid by the Swedish arms manufacturer, was determined to revive the scandal. The ruling party was equally hell-bent on crushing this initiative. Last week, *The Hindu* again published a sackful of documents proving even more conclusively that the multi-crore payments made by Bofors for the gun purchase were definitely commissions paid to Indians for facilitating the deal with the Government. This came as another sharp rebuff to the prime minister who has claimed in shifting stands that no Indians had received money, or that the payments were for "winding-up costs" or for "industrial espionage".

But even the new evidence that has surfaced is unlikely to have the impact it might have had because of the bumbling on the issue by the ruling party's arch-foe Vishwanath Pratap Singh. Unfortunately, the issues and details have now been overtaken—even obscured—by the ugly debate in Parliament, the echoes of which are still reverberating across the land. And the foundation-stone for this first round debacle for the Opposition was laid by none other than Singh.

In the past, when it came to attacking the prime minister and the ruling party

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AMETHI

Homing In

POLITICIANS are like migratory birds, homing into their constituencies, each time election season comes around. Last fortnight Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi went home to Rae Bareli and Amethi to mingle with the *hoi polloi* and ensure that they did not desert him for any upstarts. The verve with which his three-day visit was conducted indicated the prime minister could be toying with the idea of holding an early general election.

Unlike his visit in September last year, the prime objective this time was clear: establish as close a rapport with the people as possible; cut the starch and be casual. Extravagant police arrangements were given scant regard, and Rajiv stopped his jeep often to interact with the crowds lining the barricades. In Amethi the informality ran well with the people. Said Sri Ram, 41, a betel seller of Gauriganj: "The people finally got to see from close quarters whom they had voted for."

That could bear repetition. For in covering more than 250 kilometres in his constituency, the prime minister finally broke out of his security shell, even visiting the annual "Kartik Purnima mela" in which the backward sections of 18 districts of the state participate. In practised politico style Rajiv visited Baba Nandmehar's temple and offered prayers before taking a spin through the fair. Of course that didn't wash well with those who found themselves summarily ejected from the precincts by security personnel.

But for Rajiv, with more than a lakh people to practise his charm on, it was a happy hunting ground. He wandered around downing the odd *jalebi* and accepting garlands that people kept waving.

Rajiv's tour had generated considerable interest since it suffered four postponements in September, with newspapers suggesting he had chickened off in the face of Sanjay Singh's activities. Singh had been declaring he would not let Rajiv enter Amethi. But when Singh announced his 'padyatra' from Amethi to New Delhi, which he began on November 14, Rajiv's overdue trip was also promptly announced.

Initially things looked none too bright for the ruling party. At his first public meeting in Rae Bareli on November 22 there were barely 35,000 people present, and half of them left before Rajiv could say Jai Hind. But next day on, the extensive touring of Amethi, starting at 8.30 a.m. and winding up around midnight, began to produce more encouraging results. Turn-outs were enthusiastic, and Rajiv took diversions to visit villages. He also made it a point to meet local party officials, and accord them due status on the dais.

The way everything went must have been confidence bolstering for all concerned, especially since the Sanjay Singh offensive had severely undermined local Congress(I) enthusiasm. And with the normally soft-spoken Narayan Dutt Tiwari unleashing a diatribe that even paled the acerbic utterances of Communications Minister Bir Bahadur Singh, the Congress(I) and Rajiv seemed well on their way to putting their act together.

—DILIP AWASTHI in Amethi

Rajiv and Sonia in Amethi

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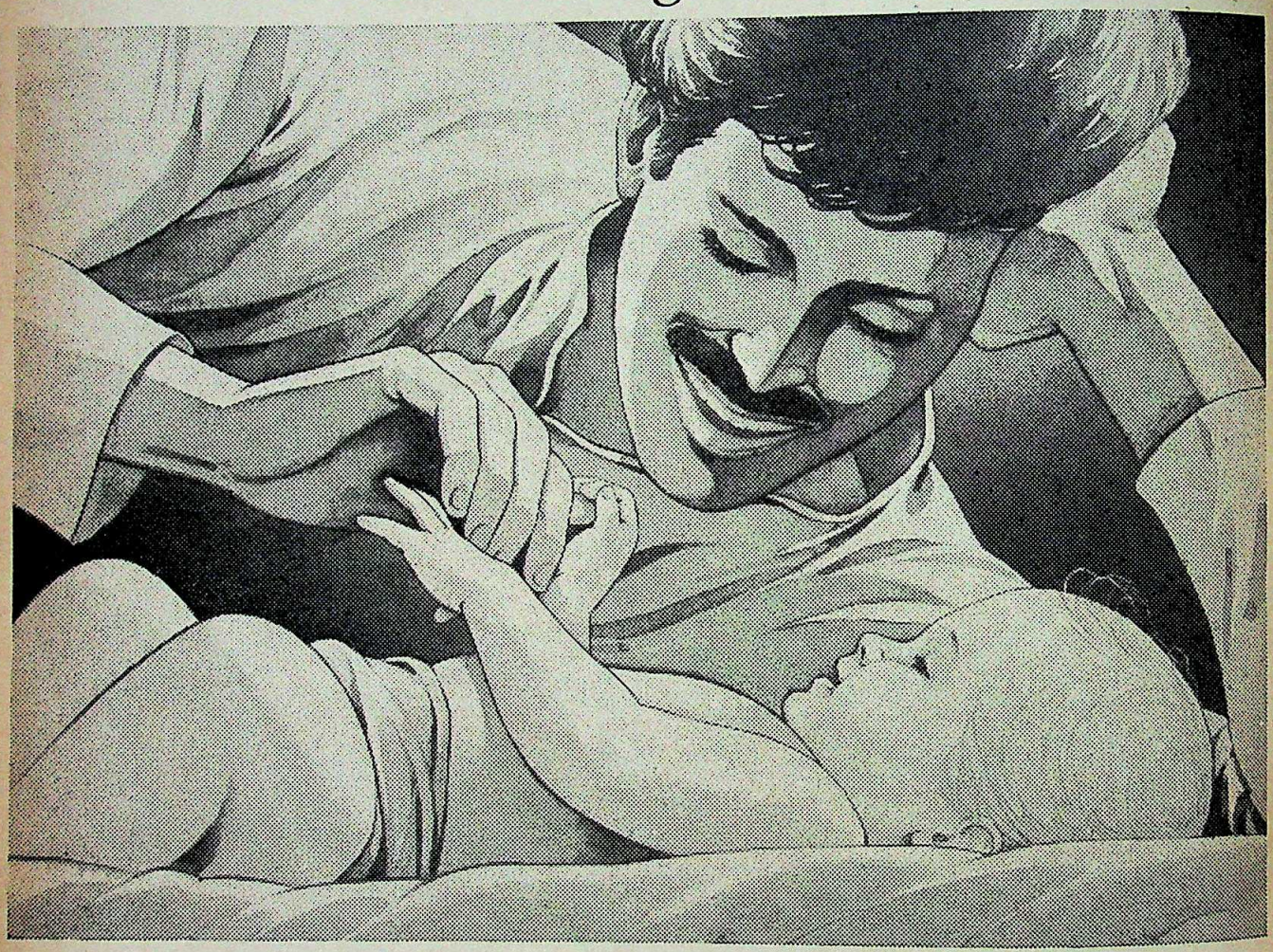
Because for a child love alone is not enough...



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Singh had stuck to caution, tempered with innuendo. The frontal assault had been used with care and deliberation. But on November 4, in a speech in Patna, Singh was reported to have claimed that Bofors had in fact deposited money into a Swiss account belonging to Rajiv Gandhi. It was his biggest tactical goof and gave the ruling party the handle it had been seeking for launching an all-out *ad hominem* blitzkrieg against the former finance and defence minister. Congress(I) members challenged Singh in the Lok Sabha to repeat his allegation on the floor. Singh hummed and hawed. And all hell broke loose.

So bilious was the exchange that most of Home Minister Buta Singh's speech was expunged from the Lok Sabha records. What wasn't expunged was bad enough. At one point, CPI(M) member Somnath Chatterjee spoke of the "filth and garbage which is really the substance of the speech of K.K. Tewary". But Chatterjee stooped to the same level a few minutes later, saying of the prime minister: "He has referred to V.P. Singh sharing beds with the Opposition. I hope he does not share beds with the Congress people. Then he will have AIDS."

The wife, mother, father, children and other relatives of Singh were dragged unceremoniously into the slimy debate. "Never in my 18 years in Parliament have I seen anything of this kind," decalred the Congress(S) leader K.P. Unnikrishnan. The Janata Dal leader George Fernandes, said in the same vein: "It would be an insult to the people of the market-place to call it a fishmarket."

THOUGH the debate had been initiated by Madhu Dandavate of the Janata Dal, he was not even allowed to properly formulate his point—that though the Government had repeatedly denied it in the past, it had now been proved that commissions were paid in the Rs 1700-crore gun deal.

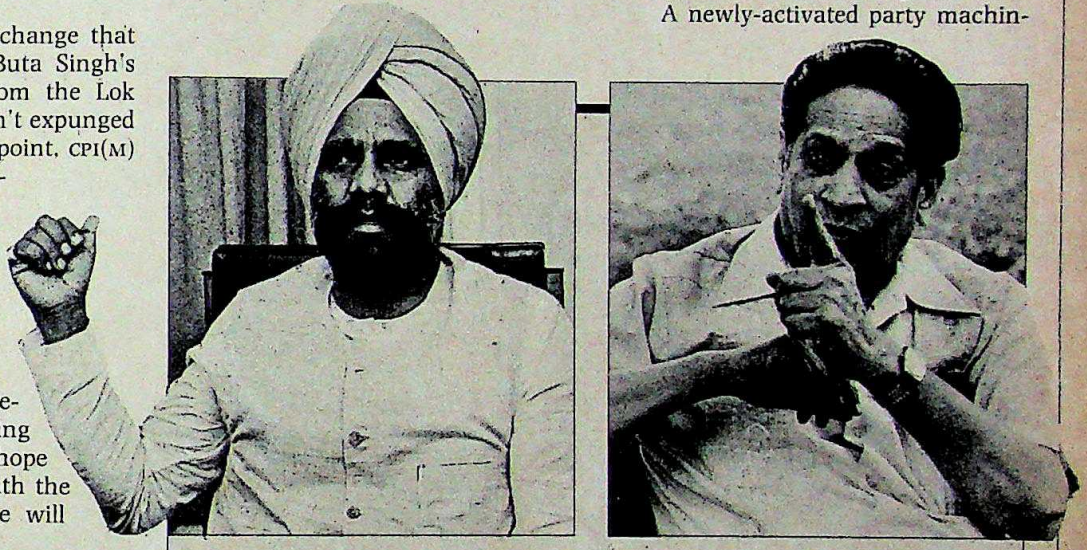
But Congress(I) leaders loudly sidestepped the issue, insistently focussing instead on what V.P. Singh had said in Patna. Who got the money did not seem to matter. "The whole effort of the treasury bench was to sideline the main issue of my contention that the prime minister and the defence minister had told Parliament an untruth. But I did not imagine that they will stoop so low to save face. My basic contention still stands that the prime minister and the defence minister indulged in breach of parliamentary privilege," said Dandavate.

The ruling party's inversion of the debate was done with remarkable cohesion. At least five ministers, including Buta Singh and Vasant Sathe, swung into the act, along with two general secretaries, to turn the discussion into a propaganda war against Singh. Minister of State for External Affairs K.K. Tewary started by challenging Singh to authenticate the documents which proved commissions were paid. When Singh willingly began to sign them in the House, Buta Singh and Minister of State for Home Chidambaram jumped up to demand that he authenticate newspaper accounts of what he'd said in Patna. In short his inference was that the accounts belonged to Rajiv. Singh demurred.

The party also mass-produced posters proclaiming that Singh's lie had been nailed and plastered them on walls across the country. Obviously, the Congress(I) takes the threat presented by Singh—the only opposition hope against the prime minister—very seriously and the effort is to use his rash speech at Patna to tarnish his credibility and show him up as a coward who is unwilling to stick his neck out to press home an accusation he once made.

Operation Demolish Singh went into high gear following a high-level powwow at the Prime Minister's Office. The main aim of this exercise is to galvanise, for the first time, the entire might of the ruling party against Singh. In an unusual move, Doordarshan, the ruling party's most active ally in the anti-Singh campaign, displayed a printed banner screaming "V.P. Singh fails to substantiate his charge". The programme was peppered with accounts of anti-Singh speeches by Congress parliamentarians. Singh was afforded no time for response. And this attack on the screen was repeated at least thrice during one week.

A newly-activated party machinery supplemented the propaganda from the screen. Even as Parliament continued, all PCC(I) chiefs were summoned to Delhi for a briefing on how to conduct the war against Singh. They passed an unprecedented resolution attacking an opposition leader—Singh—by name. The PCC(I) chiefs were also directed to organise mammoth sessions in all state capitals within the week to formalise strategies to counter Singh. Said Ghulam Nabi Azad, AICC(I) general secretary: "Now we will show Mr V.P. Singh how difficult it will be for him to survive in politics on the basis of falsehood. He will soon disappear from the national political scene." Added Mukul Wasnik, the boyish-looking president of the Indian Youth Congress: "The time has come when Singh should be shown his place.



Five ministers, including Buta Singh and Vasant Sathe, led the assault on V.P. Singh in Parliament. So bilious was the exchange that most of Buta Singh's speech was expunged from the Lok Sabha records.

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He has nothing in store for the development of the country except lies and lies."

But no matter how much the ruling party attacked him, Singh still continued to hog the front pages in the nation's newspapers and periodicals. And opposition leaders, instead of shunning Singh, as Congress strategists had hoped, began to project him even more tenaciously as the only credible leader in the country. Said Sharad Yadav, Lok Dal general secretary: "The Congress is clearly having nightmares about Singh. It seems as if the prime minister is having sleepless nights. They've realised that Singh has been accepted as the best alternative to the corrupt prime minister."

The Janata Dal was equally quick to use Bofors in its own propaganda war. It was the major theme of a barnstorming tour of the largely tribal Chhatisgarh area of south Madhya Pradesh. According to Fernandes, who joined Singh along with Ajit Singh, Arun Nehru and V.C. Shukla on the tour, they were greeted by massive crowds.

Singh, in the danger of being painted into a corner, seemed to have turned even more aggressive. A colleague admitted candidly: "He realises that he must meet the Congress(I) challenge head-on. If he does not he could be doomed." When asked directly by INDIA TODAY whether he believed that Rajiv had been paid a kickback in the deal, Singh refused to give a direct answer. But he insisted: "I may be corrupt or insane, and for that you can hang me. But where has the Bofors commission gone? Rajiv Gandhi can't fool the country by side-tracking the issue."

The Opposition, of course, keeps confabulating in pockets across the country to launch its own game plan and to open its own bag of dirty tricks to counter the ruling party offensive. One thing is certain. Singh, along with the leaders of other opposition parties, is going to fan out and make corruption and Rajiv Gandhi the prime election issue. And this time, since no holds are barred, the truth is unlikely to be a deterrent in the path of opposition rhetoric.

And as the countdown for the crucial Lok Sabha poll begins, the country is on the threshold of what appears to be unfolding as the dirtiest election campaign in 40 years in which the parties will be hell-bent on foul play and let the devil take the hindmost. A perverse tribute, indeed, to Jawaharlal on the eve of his 100th birthday.

—PRABHU CHAWLA, DAVID DEVADAS, and INDERJIT BADHWAR

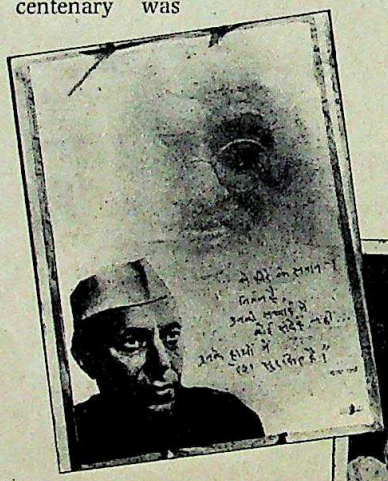
CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

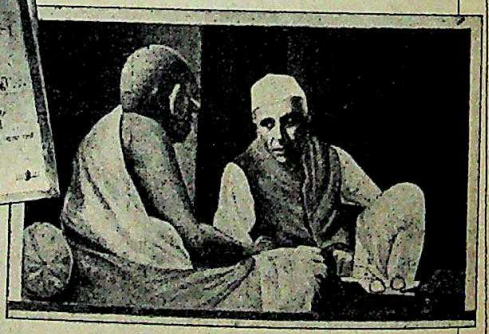
Cashing in on Nehru

WHAT are they doing to Jawaharlal Nehru? India's first prime minister and builder of modern India is being reduced to a mannequin selling the Congress(I).

The hard sell has begun. It is the charge of the ad brigade revving itself in a pre-election year. Nehru stamps, Nehru coins, Nehru badges, cassettes with his speeches, the Nehru diary, calendars. There were even plans to air-drop Nehru literature.

Last fortnight, the Nehru birth centenary was launched in Delhi's Teen Murti House. Lata Mangeshkar sang against the backdrop of a kitschy billboard of painted freedom fighters. And Nehru posters mushroomed on Delhi's road-dividers and flyovers.





A Nehru industry, surely government-inspired, is clearly on steam. Not only is there the 52-part *Bharat Ek Khoj*, Shyam Benegal's electronic translation of *Discovery of India*. There's Manju Singh's six-part *People Remember* and other programmes.

The Opposition, of course, and many Congressmen privately feel that the spirit of Nehru is missing. Says A.G. Kulkarni, the old Congressman who has returned to it after some years in the Congress(S): "To an old man like me this is American style exhibitionism." Opposition stalwarts consider it an election gimmick. Says BJP leader, L.K. Advani: "The centenary is an exercise to instal a family cult. To use the public exchequer to promote the politics of the ruling party is not good."

Veteran Janata Party leader Madhu Dandavate is upset that centenaries of other freedom leaders are not given the same treatment. "Panditji was a great man. But why don't they put all great men on par? Why are they not celebrating the centenary of Acharya Narendra Dev with the same enthusiasm? Is it because he belonged to the Socialist Party?"

Ruling party members deny that they have appropriated Nehru and his legacy. "We have opposition members on the National Committee," says Jitendra Prasad, Congress(I) MP and vice-chairman of the Implementation Committee. "We are not overselling Nehru. His message is all the more relevant today to India and the world. We need to get his message to the younger generation. Sixty per cent of our people have perhaps not even seen him."

Has the Congress(I) appropriated Nehru then? M.J. Akbar, *The Telegraph* editor, who has just written a book on Nehru, believes the Opposition needn't join the Government to celebrate the centenary. What he does fear is that the selling of Nehru that is going on might "convert Nehru into a romantic wimp". Historian Bipin Chandra, from the leftist stream, believes that "Nehru doesn't need to be sold". It is the Opposition he blames for "handing over the Nehru centenary on a platter to the ruling party, as they earlier did the Congress centenary". The question still remains: whose Nehru is he anyway?

—MADHU JAIN

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Rajiv and Gorbachev in relaxed mood: personal relations

INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS

A Subtle Shift

The three-day visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to New Delhi last fortnight offered yet another opportunity for both countries to reaffirm age-old ties and bolster cooperation. But behind the diplomatic niceties was the obvious impression that there is now an unobtrusive but significant change in the relationship. An in depth analysis of the visit.

THE scenes are now so familiar it is as if they were choreographed by the same artistic hand. Bears and ballerinas forming a baroque border to the main picture—Mikhail Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi exchanging warm handshakes and reassurances on the durability and exclusivity of Indo-Soviet relations. The latest in the series—Gorbachev's second visit to New Delhi in as many years—displayed, however, some substantial differences.

The frills were extant, in the form of the dazzling finale to the Festival of the Soviet Union in India and the more sober but impressive enough ceremony awarding the Indira Gandhi peace prize to Gorbachev. Yet, and despite the fact that India was the hosts, the visit bore the unmistakable stamp and style of the Soviet supremo—brisk and businesslike (he even informed his Indian hosts in advance that he would not address the customary end-of-the-visit press conference).

Clearly, Gorbachev was determined to keep the visit—his first since taking over as president—more low-key than the previous one and stick to bilateral basics as far as possible. That was also reflected in the choice of his entourage. Unlike his last visit in November 1986 where he was backed by an extremely high-powered and elaborate 110-member delegation, his accompanists this time were a tight group comprising strictly those concerned with the agenda for the visit—Eduard Shevardnadze, foreign minister, M.V. Kamentsev, deputy prime minister and co-chairman of the Indo-Soviet Joint Commission, K.F. Katushev, minister for foreign economic relations, Igor Rogachev, deputy foreign minister in charge of Asia, and V.G. Zakarov, minister for culture and co-chairman of the Soviet and Indian Festivals Committee. The only other high-ranking member was the first secretary of the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekestan.

That, in no way diminished the importance of the visit in the context of the subtle though significant change in Indo-Soviet relations. The truly extraordinary aspect of the no-frills visit were the impromptu remarks the two leaders were forced to make rather than any of the carefully-prepared speeches or joint statements. That, and the fact that what was predominantly a bilateral affair was eventually dominated by the looming shadow of another Asian giant—China.

On two separate and successive occasions, Gorbachev reacted sharply to what he termed "unfriendly" speculation suggesting that the ardour of the Indo-Soviet embrace had

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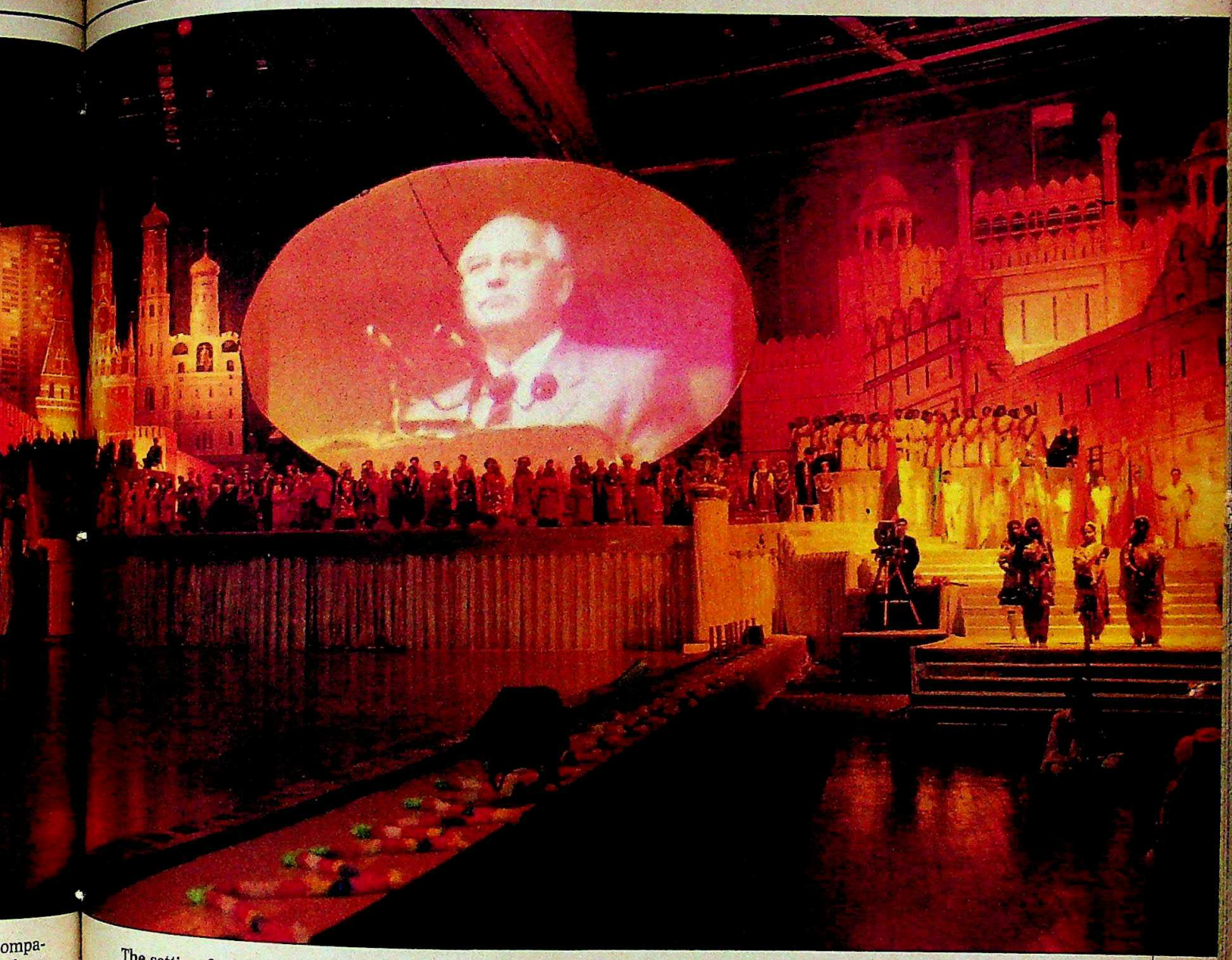

The setting for the stunning closing ceremony of the Festival of the Soviet Union in Delhi

cooled considerably. What was surprising about the statements was that there had not been any such speculation at all, except in some stray pre-visit articles in the media which would hardly qualify for the Soviet leader's attention. What then was the need for Gorbachev to suddenly act defensive?

INDIA TODAY has learnt that the "speculation" in question was in fact voiced by certain sections of the Congress (I) prior to the visit and it was at the request of the Indian Government that Gorbachev made his reiterative remarks. According to sources, senior ruling party members had voiced apprehensions that the dramatic shifts in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev meant a lesser role for India in his new global strategy. The apprehensions revolved around the bridges being rapidly built between Moscow and Beijing and its possible fall-out on Indo-Soviet relations.

The truly extraordinary aspect of the no-frills visit were the impromptu remarks the two leaders were forced to make rather than any of the prepared speeches.

That was made patently obvious by Rajiv himself. The day after Gorbachev left, Rajiv took pains to emphasise in Parliament that "Sino-Soviet and Indo-Soviet relations are exclusive of each other" and there was "no question of one being at the cost of the other". He also added that there was no discussion at all between the two leaders on India's border problems with China.

There was also a deliberate attempt to keep any mention of China out of the joint summit statement but that eventually revealed more than it hid. Behind the diplomatic facade is the undisputable fact that a Sino-Soviet rapprochement will, in no small measure, intrude upon New Delhi's relations with Moscow. The dramatic upturn in ties between Moscow and Beijing leading up to a historic Sino-Soviet summit early next year promises to be an

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THE FESTIVAL

A Dazzling Finale

IT was all very lovey-dovey. First the love. From Russia it came—3,700 tonnes of it—for the year-long stunningly impressive Festival of the USSR in India which came to a spectacular end last fortnight. Moscow had emptied a bottomless bag of the choicest Soviet delights ranging from the ethereal Bolshoi and Kirov ballets and fancy-filled circus to the earthy, folksy *unka utsav* stuff.

Next the dove. Doves made their entree during the closing ceremony—and brought the message. Or at least reiterated the one close to President Mikhail Gorbachev's heart in a telling sequence on the ice rink. An eagle sat on top of the peace sign held aloft by the skating lady. A dove, dociley below it. Next to them, three doves hovered over a globe. Soon a dove settled on top of the peace sign, displacing the eagle. Another dove straddled the blue globe. Peace had won. Uncle Sam did not look all that good.

And the Soviets had pulled it off—a second time and with as much feeling. The festival which had opened with an unexpected bang (gone were the *babushkas*, in were the pop singers and hard rock) ended with as big a bang. And not even a whimper in between. It was a year to remember: three outstanding and rare exhibitions of treasures from the Hermitage, the Kremlin State Museums and Russian Icons from Soviet Museums. Riveting performances by three circuses, the Moscow Ice Ballet, the Bolshoi and the Kirov ballets, theatre and jazz groups, pop singers and a lot else. It was a little can-can and lots of high-kicking Cossacks: 26 of the 62 groups were folk song-and-dance ensembles.

The Soviet caravan—the big and the best shows were offloaded in Delhi and other metropolitans—moved through 162 cities and towns in India, performing for millions. Big was

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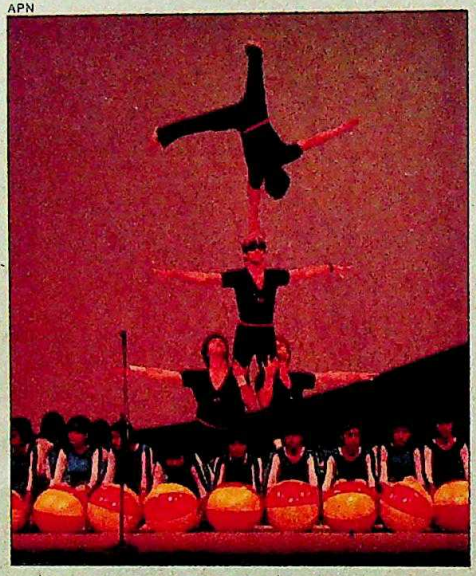

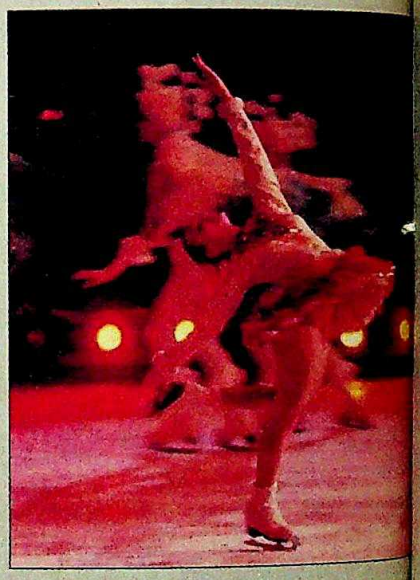

(Clockwise from right) Acrobats in action; ballet on ice and one of the folk dance ensembles

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indeed beautiful. The Russians sent 2,400 performers in the quid pro quo spirit of the festival: the Indians had sent about the same number to the USSR. The only complaint was that it was perhaps too big. It was too much of a good thing, especially the closing ceremony during the course of which all possible space in the mammothly cavernous Indira Gandhi Stadium was occupied. Had it all not been outstanding, this cultural smorgasboard would have led to cultural indigestion.

It was like a hyper-active Cecil de Mille set with a bit of Bombay cinema razzle dazzle. Suspended chandeliers, columns which moved mysteriously on ice, as if pushed by invisible hands, other columns which suddenly stretched upwards to gigantic dimensions. The seven-tiered stage flowed over with dance and acrobatics, while refined variations on the huge ice-rink below dazzled the Indian audience. Dream-like apparitions moved effortlessly on the white expanse. Trapeze artists swung in the air as if they were moving through water. The giant oval video screen highlighted the best as well as served up the occasional message in documentary footage: the Delhi Declaration, visits by leaders of the two countries, Lenin. In between illuminated cut-outs of the Kremlin and the Red Fort was the gossamer-like screen which took on the themes of the sequences. Right up front were the bars and trampolines where Olympian gymnasts Elena Chouchounova, Dimitri Bilozerchev and Vladimir Artemov showed their prowess.

The sole jarring note: the Hindi-Roosi jugalbandi approach. Next to the exuberant Russians, the Indian dancers in their dowdy salwar kameezes were embarrassingly pathetic. They wiggled their shoulders like extras in the disco scenes of the Hindi films of the '60s. Their performances were no more than jazzed-up versions of school PT exercises. The choreography was Russian. But Ananda Shankar, whose group it was, should have known how to say *nyet*.

The Indians, however, did score with the scene-stealing Goan pop singer, Remo Fernandez, a dark and charismatic version of George Michael, who alone was able to dominate all the stages. He had the audience tapping along as he stomped about singing "Take me back to Moscow. It is the place I want to be..."

That is exactly where he will be going. An unexpected fallout of the festivals is a commercial exchange of pop singers. Move over Bharatnatyam. CBS has organised a singing tour for Fernandez in the Soviet Union next February. And Soviet pop singer, Valery Leontiev who sang up a storm in India, goes on a six-city tour in India later this month. Both will cut discs for CBS.

It is indeed ironic that the meeting ground for the two old allies should have turned out to be pop music. Says Daljit Aurora, the tireless director-general of the Festival of India who steered the festivals through an obstacle-ridden course: "We told the Russians at the outset that if they wanted to reach out to the youth of India they could not avoid rock and jazz. The stodgy image we wrongly hold of their country had to be replaced. Similarly, the Indian image in the Soviet Union also has to be changed in the era of *glasnost*. Classical music yes, but Indian pop music too."

The curtains have come down on the two festivals. The Indian exchequer was drained by Rs 41 crore, maybe more. But the goodwill encashed is greater. And those *babushkas* and the boy-in-love-with-his-tractor image of the Soviets has been replaced by the upbeat, swinging Russian in tune with the changing times.

—MADHU JAIN

enduring and mutually beneficial one. Says a senior Indian diplomat: "We believe that bilateral relations between Moscow and Beijing will improve substantially. The Chinese feel the US has been taking them for granted. Closer ties with Moscow will benefit them more in the long run, strategically as well as economically. In Gorbachev, they see a man with whom they can do business."

Gorbachev, in fact, did dwell extensively on the present and possible future course of Sino-Soviet ties during his nine-hour, one-on-one discussions with Rajiv during which he also strongly stressed on the necessity of India mending its fences with China. It is true that India's border differences with Beijing were not discussed but that is largely because of Beijing's fabled inscrutability. The high-level official Indian delegation led by Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon and including two of Rajiv's key aides, Gopi Arora and Ronen Sen, joint secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, has already visited Beijing thrice in connection with Rajiv's proposed visit to China next month, the latest being immediately after Gorbachev left New Delhi.

BUT so far, the Chinese are keeping their cards close to their tunics. Rajiv has already announced that there will be no attempt to tackle the border issue during his visit. Thus, as far as the Indian side is concerned, the final outcome of the first Sino-Indian summit since 1954 is still clouded by uncertainty.

Indian officials, however, point out that there will be no immediate or dramatic changes in post-summit relations between Moscow and Beijing and any such alteration will take time to evolve. Thus, on the diplomatic front, the Soviet Union's relations with China will not impinge on its relationship with India over the next few years.

But even so, Gorbachev's visit did underline the fact that there has been an unobtrusive shift in Indo-Soviet relations. At the highest level, the warmth and closeness is still intact. But that is more a reflection of the personal rapport established between Rajiv and Gorbachev during the four meetings they have had so far rather than any deliberate policy. At the broader level, the relationship is now based much more on current realities and the swiftly changing international scenario. More important, it is unencumbered by the dogmas and ideological baggage of the past. Gorbachev, for instance, deliberately avoided meeting leaders of the two communist parties, something that was once obligatory for visiting Soviet leaders.

As the latest visit revealed, the dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and more vitally, in Soviet foreign policy under Gorbachev, cannot but help bring about a change in Indo-Soviet relations. The most significant being that while political contacts will stay on an even keel, the focus of the relationship will now shift to the economic content.

The wide-ranging economic agreements backed by the largest-ever credit (3.2 billion roubles) commitment on the part of the Soviets during the visit is clear indication of that, as is the new direction of the economic thrust—in nuclear and thermal power, space, science and technology, civil aviation and petrochemicals, areas that signify a marked shift from traditional areas of cooperation. "The Soviets have been very consistent about tailoring their economic assistance to Indian self-reliance," says an official. "In the '50s and '60s it was in steel and heavy industry. Of late, it has been in areas where we are still trying to find our own feet. In economic terms, it looks like they are keen to broaden the relationship into more long-term commitments."

In that sense, both leaders were right when they stated that the relationship has reached a higher plane. "The relationship

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has matured enough to have reached a stage where neither side takes the other for granted," says a member of the Indian delegation. On the nuclear power plant issue, for instance, Gorbachev raised the question of additional safeguards and international inspection of the facilities and pressed Rajiv to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. When Rajiv declined, Gorbachev did not push it but instead let the issue pass.

On Pakistan, again both sides preferred to discuss it in connection with the extensive discussions on the Afghanistan question rather than treat it separately. "Both sides are employing a wait-and-watch policy on Pakistan till the situation resolves itself. So there was no point in wasting too much time on a situation that is still fluid," says an Indian official.

But the underlying acceptance was that Gorbachev's remarkable new world view and its impact on the Soviet Union's foreign policy has dramatically altered Moscow's diplomatic priorities. As one official put it: "The Soviets are no longer interested in underwriting large security interests abroad." Along with the new openings to the US, western Europe, China and Japan, the Soviets are also keen to resolve issues like Afghanistan, Vietnam, Angola, Nicaragua and Cuba and restructure their earlier security commitments.

In that context, India's place on Moscow's diplomatic totem pole can only come lower down than it did during the Brezhnev era. New Delhi has, to its credit, accepted the new status, confident that the solid bedrock on which Indo-Soviet relations are based—and the personal relations between Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi—will ensure that the two sides can deal with each other with a far greater degree of mutual confidence and respect.

—DILIP BOBB

HAMARI GOSHTHI

The Mystery Magazine

RAISA Gorbachev was like a headmistress on an inspection tour. But the children had not done their homework. There she sat between Silent Sonia and Not-So-Silent Najma Heptulla. And praised her brainchild, *Dialogue*, the Indo-Soviet woman's magazine published in the Soviet Union.

Its twin *Hamari Goshthi* (our gathering) is supposedly six issues old. But it has neither been seen. Nor heard. So, the more the gregarious first lady of the Soviet Union talked about the avalanche of letters to the Soviet magazine, the more the faces of the women assembled in New Delhi's Hyderabad House turned red.

Raisa was naturally interested in the health of the magazine, which was conceived after her first visit to India two years ago. There was a pregnant silence when she asked about the response and reach of the magazine. The ladies present held their breath and hoped it would pass. And it did.

Nobody really knows how the magazine is financed or marketed. Circulation figures quoted vary from 3,500 to 7,000. But Heptulla soon cleared the mystery for INDIA TODAY. It was 10,000, she claimed. She says she brought out the first few issues with her own funds (she does not say exactly how much) and a little help from friends.

The Rs 10 magazine which is published in English from her house, is distributed to universities and libraries. Neither the Congress(I) party nor the Government have had anything to do with it. The Russian version *Dialogue* on the other hand, is produced by the Soviet Novosti press agency under the distant but watchful eye of Raisa Gorbachev.

The impressive, glossy latest issue had been specially brought out for the Gorbachev visit. This time Heptulla had some help in the form of advertisements. "We have begun to break even," says Heptulla. Encouraged, they plan to bring out a Hindi edition. They are also trying to sell the magazine to Air-India. Aeroflot already buys the magazine, as do some of the East European airlines. The government of India is obviously a distant godfather. Most of the half dozen ads are from government agencies.

Money, obviously, is not the problem. The magazine dummies are produced in Moscow. "All we have to do, says Heptulla, "is to send a few articles to Moscow and then print what they send us."

Sonia, Raisa and Heptulla; (below) copies of the magazine

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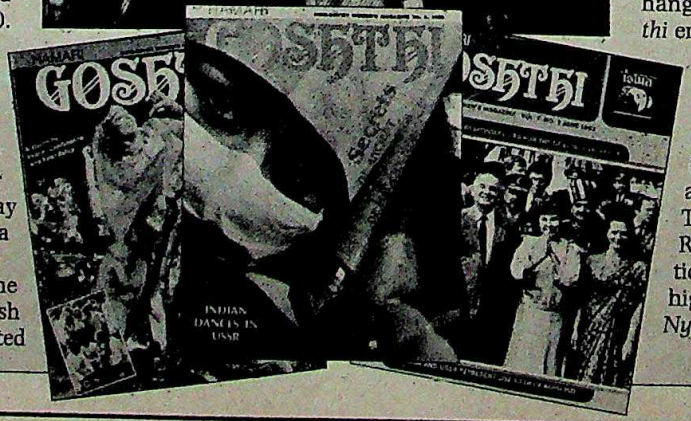

The dialogue is, however, one-sided. *Dialogue* has a circulation of 10,000 and sells for 80 kopeks (Rs 13). It is sold in 66 cities in the USSR according to Marina Blagonravova, the magazine's deputy editor-in-chief (cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova is its editor-in-chief). Readers from Ukraine even sent in a wall hanging with *Hamari Goshthi* embroidered on it.

No one from Kerala sent in a bamboo mat thus inscribed though. No wonder those ladies in Hyderabad House turned red. Their only reply to Raisa's probing questions would have been a highly embarrassed *Nyet*.

—MADHU JAIN

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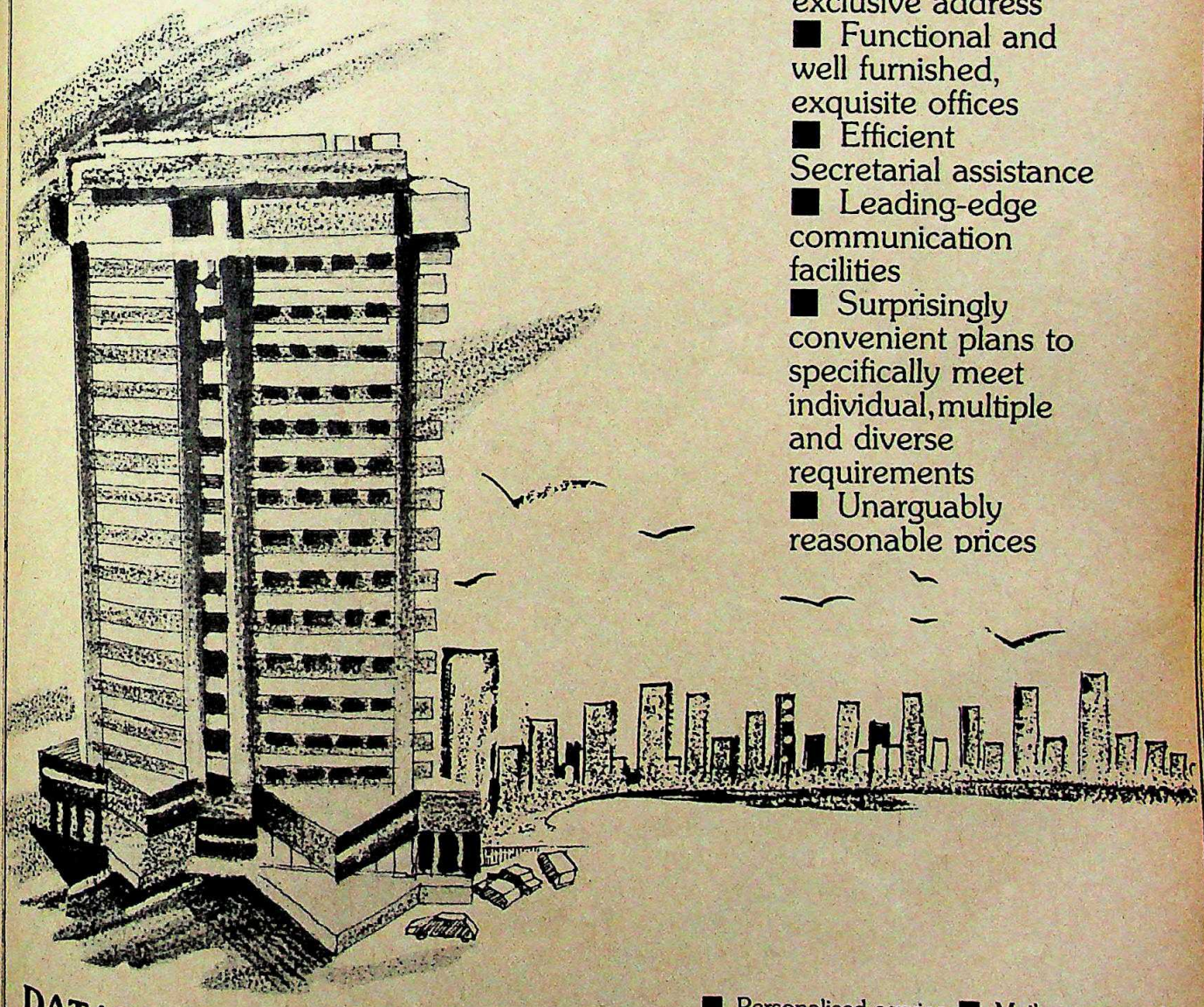

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KERALA

Troubled Times

The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front in Kerala is faced with some serious problems, some inherited and others of its own making. With the law and order situation deteriorating, the industrial front stagnating and a severe financial crunch, the Congress(I)-led opposition coalition is getting more aggressive. An assessment of the currrent crisis confronting the Front and its implications.

TWENTY months into running Kerala and the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government is still taxiing around, seeming increasingly incapable of taking off. Among the several albatrosses weighing down the Nayanar Ministry are a worsening law and order situation, unemployment, and the growing cynicism of the people.

All this is not new to E.K. Nayanar—whose last government lasted a mere 21 months, falling in October 1981. This time around, assuming the reins of government after five years of Congress(I) he was expected to emerge in better light. But the ruling LDF appears to be in a complete dither.

When the Kerala electorate gave Nayanar and the LDF a second chance, they hoped it would mark the end of the corrupt and communal era of the Congress(I). But law and order, which caused the 1981 fall, is again proving to be the chief minister's *bete noire*. Last month saw him pinned down by the Congress(I), with A.K. Antony at the helm, and the Kerala Congress (Mani group), over the deteriorating law and order situation in the Malabar area. Widespread clashes between Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and CPI(M) cadres destroyed property worth lakhs of rupees, and left several persons dead and hundreds of others injured.

Only a month ago the CPI(M) had made a peace pact with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, with which it had nearly 500 clashes between March '87 and August '88. And that is not all. Besides clashing with the Congress(I) and other opposition parties, the party has also been skirmishing with its front partners, the CPI and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). Says a top CPI leader: "The trouble with the Marxists is that they cannot contain their cadres."

The latest spurt of violence took place in Nadapuram, about 60 km north of Calicut, an area known for tension between Muslim landlords backed by the Muslim League, and backward Hindu farmers owing allegiance to the CPI(M). An Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) procession attacked a car carrying E. Kanaran, a powerful CPI(M) MLA and a leader of agricultural workers. The Marxist cadres retaliated brutally against the supporters of the League, and the police lathi-charged a protest procession by the Muslim party's members in Calicut.

The protests aggravated the situation, and for several days it was a

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virtual free-for-all in Calicut, Malappuram and Cannanore districts. Opposition Leader K. Karunakaran sought the deployment of the CRPF, while the LDF Government stood by the lathi-charge. But what angered everyone, including CPI(M) supporters, was Nayanar's tactless remark that "the police will throw stones back at you if they are hit by stones".

The Muslim League demanded a judicial probe into the lathi-charge and the desecration of mosques. But the CPI(M) leadership allowed matters to drift. Then from within the LDF itself, Nadapuram MLA Satyen Mokeri threatened to go on a hunger strike over the issue. The Government had to relent.

The CPI(M) leadership is today facing trouble not only from its cadres but also from its powerful headquarters, the AKG Centre. The centre of late has been accused of remote controlling the chief minister and his party ministers. "This government is a puppet in the hands of the AKG Centre," said former chief minister and Congress(I) leader A.K. Antony.

Puppet or not, it is common knowledge in the state capital that the budget was prepared by a Marxist economist who works at a reputed institute. In fact, Finance Minister Vishwanatha Menon was not even aware of the bloomers that crept into the budget—the withdrawal of the turnover levy, and the disparities in the English and Malayalam versions of the budget—much to the embarrassment of the Government. Along with these, measures like revised power rates, the 'progressive' tax proposals, the punitive measures taken against a prestigious convent in Trivandrum, all helped show the Nayanar Ministry in bad light.

The Government also alienated the bureaucracy by the disciplinary action taken against as many as 35 top civil servants, including IAS men. Said a disgusted senior bureaucrat: "They no longer trust us and peons are deployed to spy on us. Important files find their way to the AKG Centre for clearance." The 'witch-hunts', the bureaucrats feel, are being undertaken because they dutifully carried out the orders of the previous government.

All these are serious charges, if proved. But they could have been taken in stride by the Government had it anything to show by way of tangible results. Despite its impressive manifesto, the LDF Government has not been able to put together an industrial policy document, even though it came to power on the wings of a refreshing approach. The result is that it has not been able to attract even a single major or minor industry to the state, despite industries burgeoning in other parts of the country.

On the contrary, there is a flight of capital and industries from the state, mainly to neighbouring Tamil Nadu, which lures entrepreneurs with better tax rates and a favourable industrial climate. Joining in this exodus is Irrigation Minister Baby John's son who preferred the pasture across the border. The LDF has not been able to control even its trade unions in the coir and cashew industries. The unions refuse to let companies modernise. And even these traditional industries—so far the mainstay of a substantial section of the workforce—are planning to move over to Tamil Nadu. The loss incurred by the cashew industry alone amounted to Rs 70 crore in scarce foreign exchange.

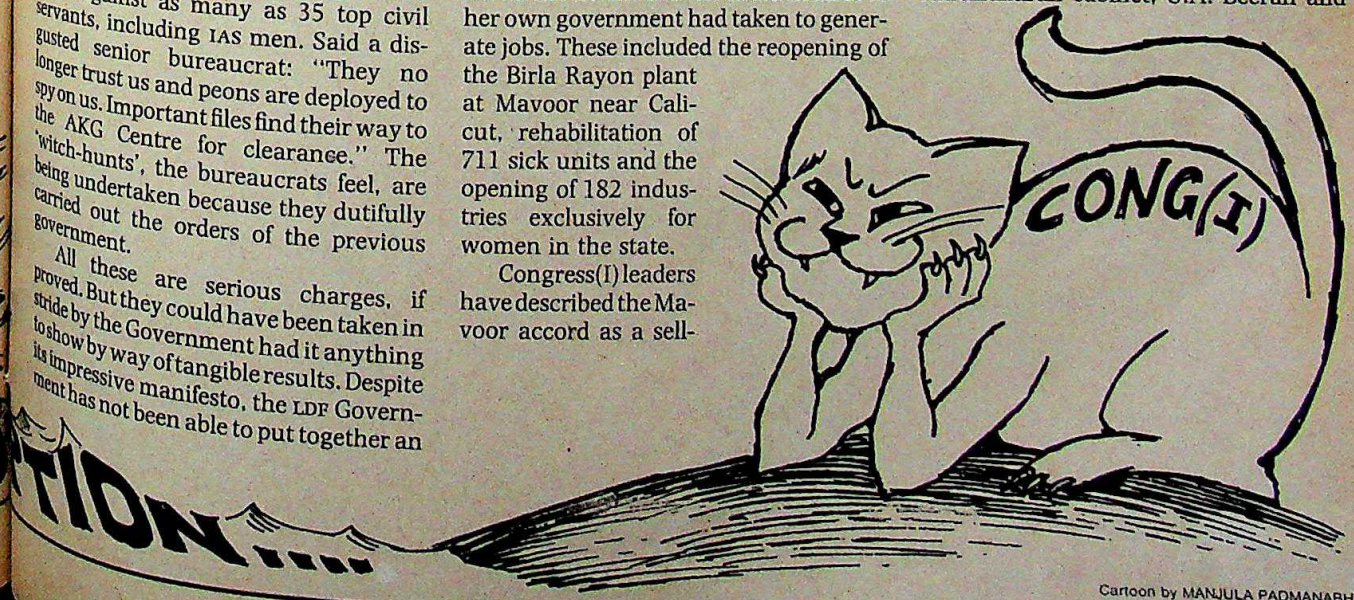
Law and order which caused the 1981 fall is again proving to be the chief minister's *bete noire*

Undaunted, Industry Minister K.R. Gowri blamed the Centre and its discriminatory attitude for the stagnation on the industrial front. And she listed measures her own government had taken to generate jobs. These included the reopening of the Birla Rayon plant at Mavoor near Calicut, rehabilitation of 711 sick units and the opening of 182 industries exclusively for women in the state.

Congress(I) leaders have described the Mavoor accord as a sell-out to the Birlas, with the Government capitulating to their demand to supply soft wood at Rs 250 per tonne while the Government gets it from Karnataka at Rs 800 per tonne. Nevertheless, Gowri's charge of discrimination by the Centre is not entirely baseless. The resource crunch has become quite palpable. Says Menon: "My main job is to marshal funds to pay off the dues to the Centre. Last year we had to pay Rs 200 crore in loans and interest. This year it is Rs 290 crore. We are adhering strictly to repayment schedules, considering the bitter experience of last year when they froze the overdraft facility." The first Marxist minister to handle the tricky finance portfolio in 30 years, Menon's task is unenviable—even though he has the assistance of Sreedharan Namboodiripad, a chartered accountant and son of the CPI(M) supremo E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the party's general secretary .

If the Marxist leaders had confined themselves to getting out of this mess they could have still muddled through. "But the CPI(M), the major partner in the ruling Left Front, has been clipping the wings of the four CPI ministers who have been doing a better job despite the same handicaps," says K.M. Chummar, the *Malayala Manorama* columnist. Even the veteran Baby John has been so shoddily treated that he hardly attends office and is in Calcutta trying to patch up inter-party differences at the national level. The CPI(M) is giving its minor partners in the front a taste of the medicine the Centre is doling out to it—starving it of funds.

The beleaguered Marxist Government has, however, been able to control corruption to a certain extent—it has been able to indict two former ministers in the Karunakaran cabinet, U.A. Beeran and



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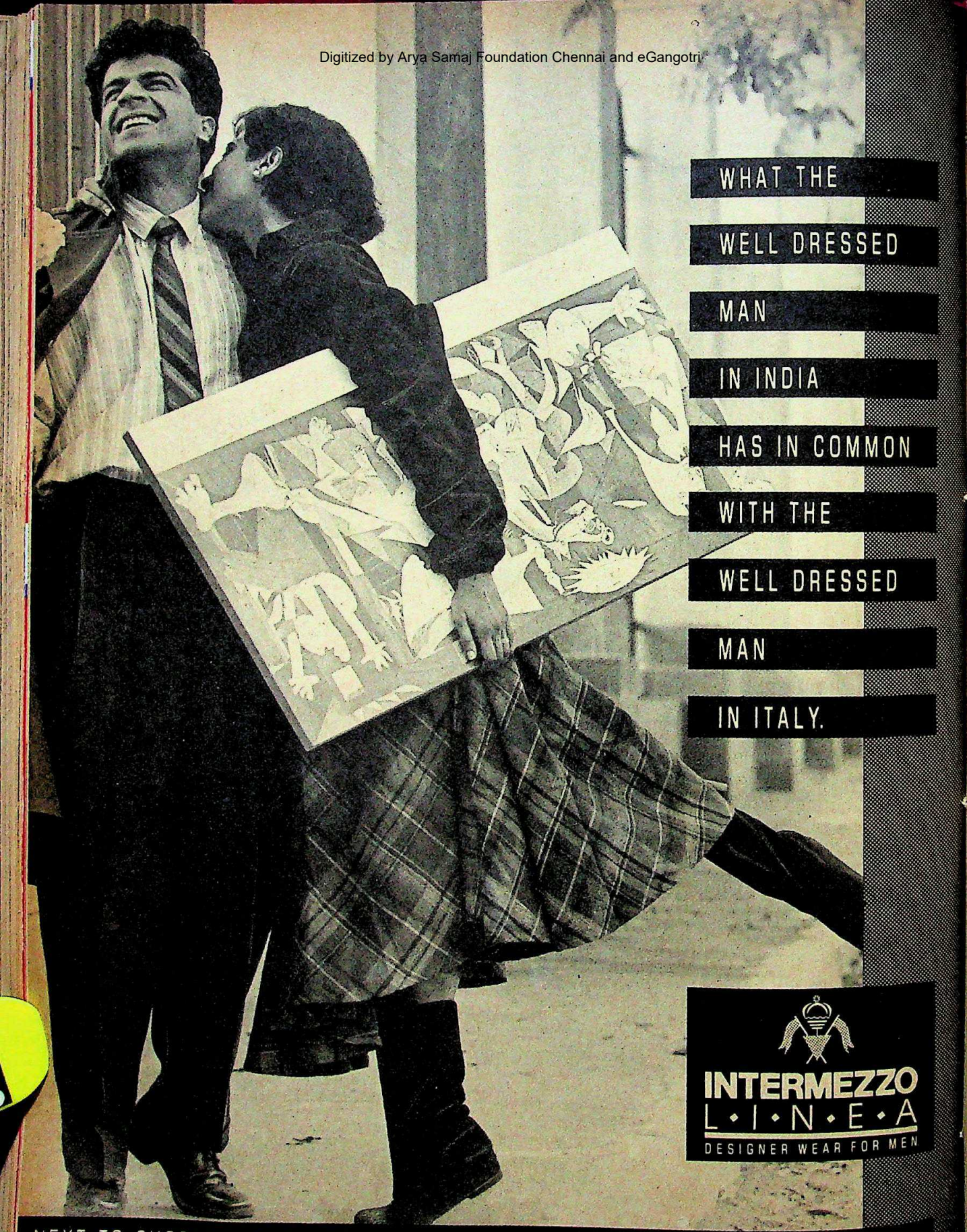

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Balakrishna Pillai, involved in the rice deal and the leakage in the Edamalayar dam, respectively. But this victory in the fight against corruption seems rather empty. Said a businessman: "The entire industrial front is at a standstill because the administration has ground to a halt. During Karunakaran's time files used to move, though at a price."

But, finally, the CPI(M) seems to be opening its eyes. A contrite V.S. Achuthanandan, the powerful CPI(M) secretary, conceded that his party was definitely trying to correct errors committed in the past and would try to improve its track record.

This optimism is not shared by his arch-rivals, Vayalar Ravi and Karunakaran of the Congress(I). Asks Karunakaran: "How long can they fool the public? There is no administration and the law and order situation is worsening."

To top it all, at least 11 ministers of the 19-member Nayanar Cabinet have been plagued by ill-health and have been in hospital, and this is worrying the party no end. The CPI(M) is now trying to infuse fresh blood into the party.

At this juncture, the last thing the CPI(M) would want is a law and order problem. Unable to contain its cadres, or the lengthening line of jobless youth, and with the Opposition waiting for the kill, the party needs all its tactical and economic expertise to survive. The Nadapuram skirmish, though minor, is enough to rock Nayanar's boat. He just cannot afford the luxury of allowing his police to go around throwing stones, whatever the provocation.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

E.K. NAYANAR

"A definite neglect"

AFTER 20 months of his second term in office, the amiable E.K. Nayanar, 69, is yet to come to grips with the major problems confronting the state. In an hour-long interview with INDIA TODAY *at his office in the secretariat in Trivandrum, Nayanar defended his government. Excerpts:*

SHYAM TEKWANI

Q. *There has been widespread criticism that your government has been ineffective.*

A. I think we have done a reasonably good job in spite of the grave financial crisis and discriminatory attitude of the Centre. We have no money for development works due to the financial mismanagement of the previous regime. The state's debt liability when the Karunakaran government took over in 1982 was Rs 1,113 crore which went up to Rs 2,779 crore by the time they were voted out. The UDF government survived on Central largesse but when the LDF came to power the situation changed drastically. First there was a great drought and then when we requested a grant of Rs 600 crore we received a paltry Rs 10 crore. We are repaying loans taken by the UDF government.

Q. *But you have hardly done anything on the industrial front other than the reopening of Birla's Mavoor pulp factory.*

A. The industrial climate in the state at the moment is peaceful. We have reopened many factories, sick industries have been streamlined and traditional industries like cashew and coir have been given a boost. But above all we reopened the Birla owned Mavoor pulp factory which was a major election promise of ours. The Karunakaran government could not accomplish that.

Q. *There is a feeling that you continue blaming the Centre for all your short-comings.*

A. There is definitely a neglect of Kerala by the Centre. Projects promised for Kerala go to other states. The Centre's policies especially import-export have been cruel on Kerala's cash crops and Central investment in Kerala has come down drastically from 3.28 per cent in 1974 to 1.58 per cent in 1987.

Q. *Is it true that you have alienated the bureaucrats and created discontent in the administration?*

A. A bureaucrat during Karunakaran's days was the real ruler. There was rampant corruption among them, as you can see from the number of bureaucrats being investigated by various enquiry commissions. They must be unhappy today because they are not getting any bribes.

Q. *Is the AKG Centre (the CPI(M) headquarters in Trivandrum) proving to be a parallel secretariat?*

A. The leaders at the AKG Centre have never interfered with the working of this government. The AKG Centre is the nerve centre of the party and the front's policies are definitely moulded there.

Q. *What about the opposition allegation that there has been a total breakdown of law and order in the state?*

A. From 1957 onwards when the communists first came to power in Kerala, the Congress has been shouting itself hoarse about law and order. There are frequent RSS-CPI(M) clashes because basically the RSS is anti-communist and the Congress(I) makes use of them and other communal parties like IUML to fish in troubled waters.

Q. *But your critics claim that your government had to hastily withdraw all major policy decisions.*

A. Yes. We have changed decisions in the past and may do so in the future if the people so desire.

Q. *There have been rumours that your coalition partners especially the RSP and its leader Baby John have not been very happy with the CPI(M)'s big brother attitude.*

A. Baby John is no Jatin Chakraborty. Nobody will leave this front. We may have minor differences, but these are ultimately patched up.

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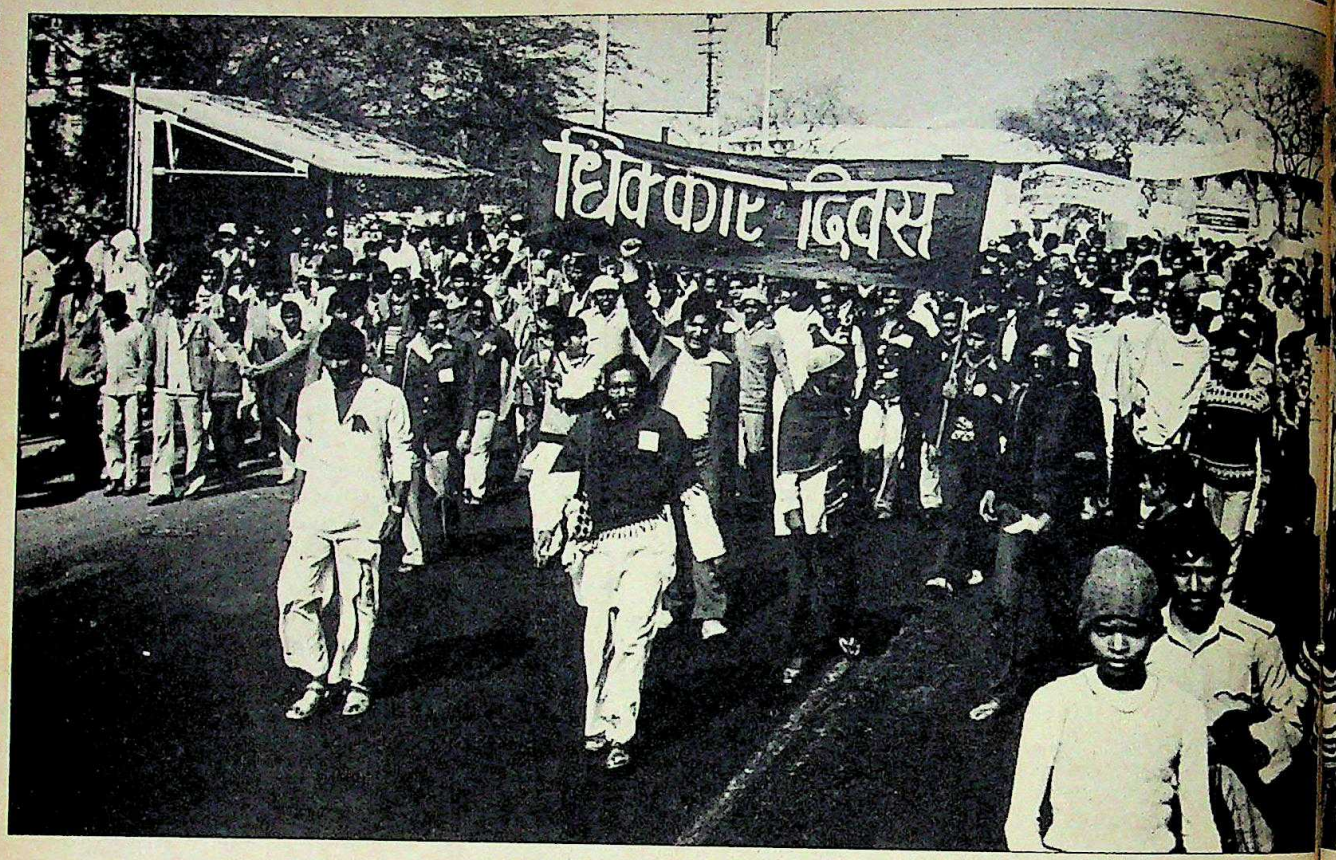

BHOPAL TRAGEDY

Wages of Bungling

Four years after methyl iso-cyanate fumes rose from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal, killing nearly 3,000 and condemning tens of thousands to slow death, the victims and their families have got little by way of relief or compensation. Corporate callousness and official bungling have combined to perpetuate endlessly history's worst industrial disaster.

WHO'S bothered, really? As the fourth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster trundles around this fortnight, attention will briefly be focused on the tragedy again. The grim faces of victims will peer at TV cameras, speeches will be made, rallies organised, prayers offered, and effigies of the 'multinational demon' burnt. The ritual over, most of the world will placidly return to business as usual.

For Kailash Panwar, 26, though, life will never return to what it was before December 3, 1984. Taken for dead, he had been dumped into a truck carrying bodies to the morgue. He managed to get out of the stinking pile of devastated humanity only to remain condemned to the life of a cripple, unable to help himself. "My life is worse than death," he says, as he lies listlessly in a Delhi hospital. He used to be a driver, but will never work again. The family survives on the sewing jobs his wife picks up around the neighbourhood.

Panwar is just one of tens of thousands, whose lives were destroyed by the gases which escaped from the Union Carbide pesticide factory in Bhopal four years ago. Death still looms large over them. On average, one gas victim succumbs to his injuries every day—pushing up the toll from 1,800 in December 1984 to 3,289 four years later. Methyl isocyanate (MIC) has ravaged the vitals of human as well as ecological systems, destroying immunity levels and increasing the incidence of various diseases.

Some of those who survived almost wish they hadn't. They have gradually been reduced to frustrated despair as hopes of relief and compensation recede. Today, Bhopal has become a symbol, not

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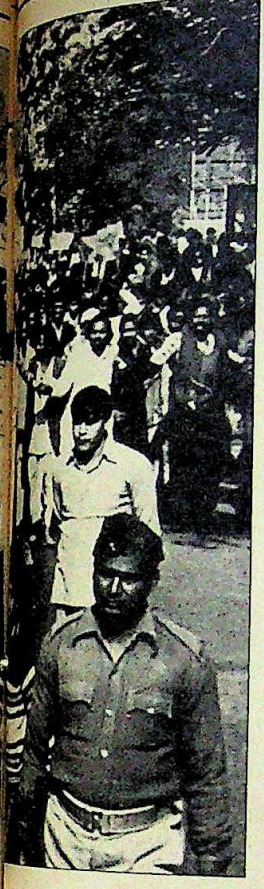
KAMLESH JAIMINI



PRAKASH HATVALNE

On an average, one gas victim succumbs to his injuries every day—pushing up the toll from 1,800 in December 1984 to 3,289 now. MIC has ravaged the vitals of human as well as ecological systems, increasing the incidence of various diseases.

just of the colossal industrial hazards of this age, but also of corporate callousness and governmental bungling. The victims have so far received a paltry sum of Rs 1,500 each from the Madhya Pradesh Government. That is all. Even an official memorandum prepared for submission to the prime minister in the last week of November, states that "relief/rehabilitation measures are so far inadequate. New and greater efforts are required."

That puts things mildly. The truth is the victims have become pawns in a complex legal battle they can neither understand nor contest. The faceless bureaucrats of the Government of India and the powerful bosses of the transnational giant have together spent more money fighting the court case than on relief for the survivors. Action groups and arm-chair radicals, their voices shrill, hardly know the plight of the victims in whose name they staunchly oppose any effort for an out-of-court settlement.

Under a 1985 law, the Government of India is solely responsible for relief and treatment and for obtaining damages from the US-based Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), whom most hold responsible for the tragedy. Though the plant was operated by Union Carbide (India) Ltd (UCIL), the majority shares of the subsidiary are held by UCC, which apparently closely controlled the Indian operation.

While the victims have given up on adequate relief from the variety of official agencies in Bhopal, the compensation question has taken centre-stage. It dominates court proceedings as well, though other cases pleading for better medical facilities and for stop-gap compensation from the Government are also pending.

Carbide's Vice-President for Public Affairs and its chief spokesman, Ronald Wishart, told INDIA TODAY last fortnight that the litigation process is more or less a dead end. He applauded Chief Justice R.S. Pathak's recent urging that both sides "start with a clean slate". He refused to speculate on whether this might be a precursor to a negotiated settlement but said it would be "wonderful" if it were.

However, hopes of the elusive money are almost dead among the victims. A settlement at around $600 million was very nearly negotiated (INDIA TODAY, December 15, 1987) but the Government backed down before a chorus of protest.

Those against compromise assert that the Bhopal case is not just about money.

Deo ordered UCC to pay Rs 350 crore pending final judgement. Predictably, UCC appealed against the decision.

R.C. SAHU

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"Our frustration with the Government cannot be understood by anyone outside Bhopal."

ANIL SADGOPAL
non-official member of the Supreme Court committee.

"Government must consult the action groups before a settlement... or we shall oppose it."

ALOK PRATAP SINGH
Zahrili Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha

Former Supreme Court judge V.R. Krishna Iyer and three other jurists argue: "The case aims to vindicate a principle of law and justice of global significance: multinational enterprises engaged in hazardous activity must be strictly liable in law." For their part, victims' groups oppose a compromise, apprehending that a settlement would include dropping of criminal charges against the UCC and UCIL bosses. Said Jabbar Khan of Bhopal Gas Pidit Udyog Sangathan: "Accountability must be established if future Bhopals are to be prevented." Alok Pratap Singh of Zahrili Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha, the other major victims' group, said: "The Government must consult action groups before negotiating a settlement with Carbide. Otherwise we shall oppose it."

So the tortuous litigation goes on. Hundreds of hearings, $55 million in legal fees in the US and India, and four years after the process began, the end is nowhere in sight. Initially there was a delay of four months in filing the case in New York. A year later, the case was sent back to India, but it took the Government another four months to file a case in the Bhopal district court. Then, the district judge postponed hearing for months to allow the Government to negotiate a settlement with the UCC.

When nothing came of that, Bhopal District Judge M.W. Deo, ordered UCC to pay Rs 350 crore to the victims pending the outcome of the case. Deo was moved by the plight of the victims to pass that order, though the Government had not asked for it. The case would have meandered a long way before final judgement. UCC was sure to demand that each of the 5.8 lakh claimants be produced and cross-examined in court. "Even to bring all the claim forms to court would need 40 trucks," says a senior official. "Examining witnesses could take 300 years." Predictably, UCC appealed against Deo's order.

On April 4 this year, the high court held that Deo's dependence on his powers under the Civil Procedure Code to create special procedures where necessary was not justified in this case. However, Justice S.K. Seth of the high court held there was enough prima facie evidence of UCC's liability for him to order it to pay Rs 250 crore as interim compensation pending final judgement. The UCC moved a review petition, which was rejected.

The matter did not rest there. On September 8, the Supreme Court admitted cross-petitions filed by the Union Government and UCC challenging the high court order. The Government challenged the reduction in the amount of interim relief from Rs 350 to Rs 250 crore. Carbide too challenged the order to pay interim damages in a case which was yet to be decided.

Much more confident than it was a year ago, UCC is now tenaciously fighting the crucial case before a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court. Time is on UCC's side. The longer it takes, the greater the pressure on the Indian Government to get something for the victims. Second, the burden of adverse public opinion is fast decreasing. And, perhaps most important, UCC saves the interest on whatever it

CARBIDE CASE

A Long-Drawn Battle

1985
February 20: The Government of India issues an ordinance (later replaced by an act) taking exclusive right to represent victims.
April 8: The Indian Government sues UCC in the US for $3 billion.
April 19: Under court urging, UCC offers $5 million interim relief.

1986
March 23: Move for $350 million settlement between UCC and victims' American lawyers rejected by India.
May 12: US court transfers the case to India, asking UCC to submit to the jurisdiction of Indian courts.
September 5: The Government of India files Rs 3,900 crore compensation case against UCC in Bhopal district court.

1987
April 2: Judge M.W. Deo proposes 'reconciliatory interim relief'.
August 17: Government rejects UCC's offer of Rs 2.1 crore.
November: Government aborts agreement to accept $600 million.
December 17: Deo orders UCC to pay Rs 350 crore as interim relief.

1988
January 18: UCC appeals to high court against Deo's decision.
April 4: High court fixes UCC's liability and awards Rs 250 crore as interim damages.
July 28: A US court rules that neither the Indian Government nor an Indian court can restrain Indian citizens from settling claims in the US.
September 8: Supreme Court admits cross appeals by the UCC and the Government against high court decision.
October 11: High court rejects UCC's review petition.
October 13: High court accepts UCC's plea for transfer of the case from the district judge to the senior-most additional district judge.
October 26: Government files special leave petition in the Supreme Court against the high court order transferring the Bhopal case from the court of the district judge.

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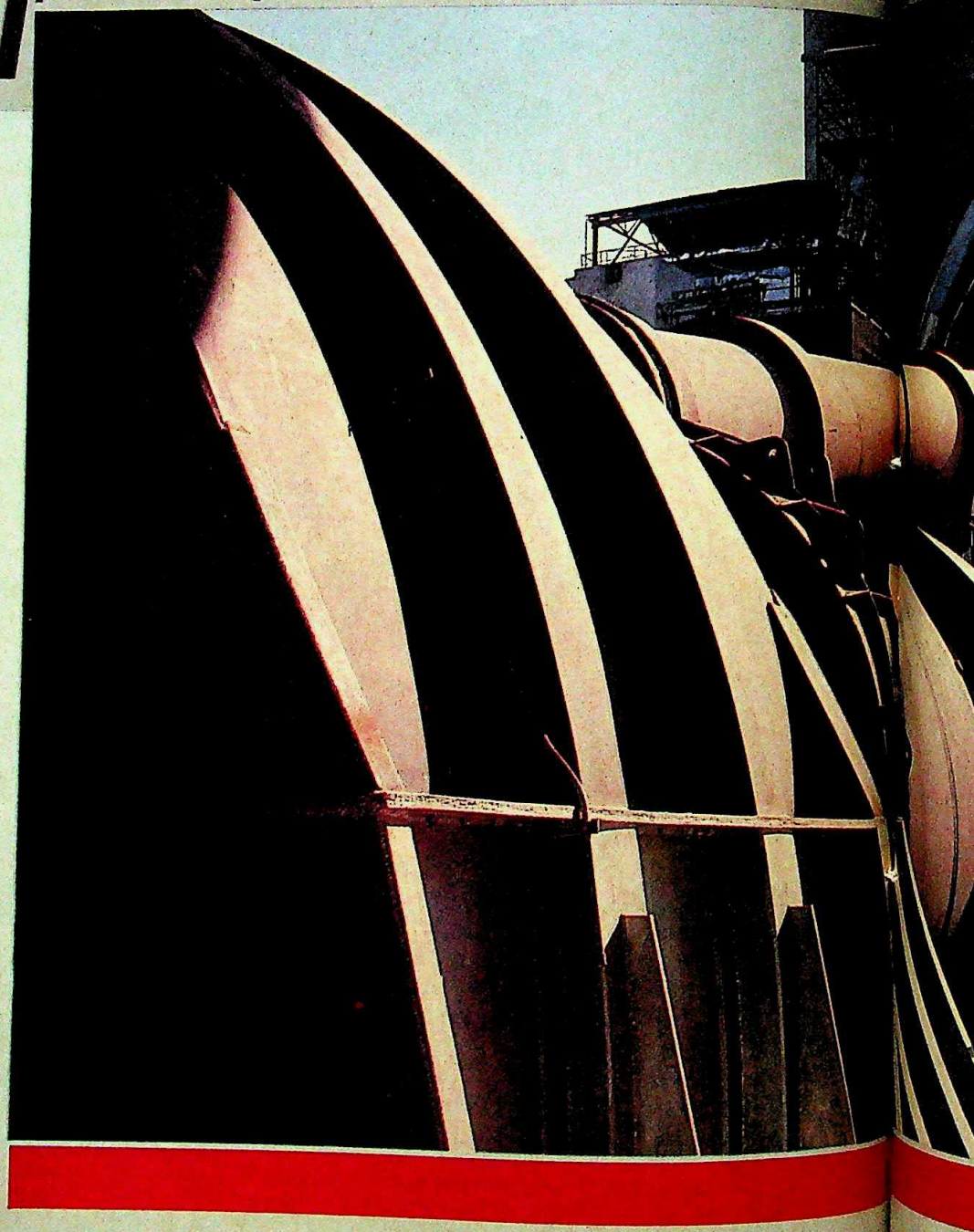

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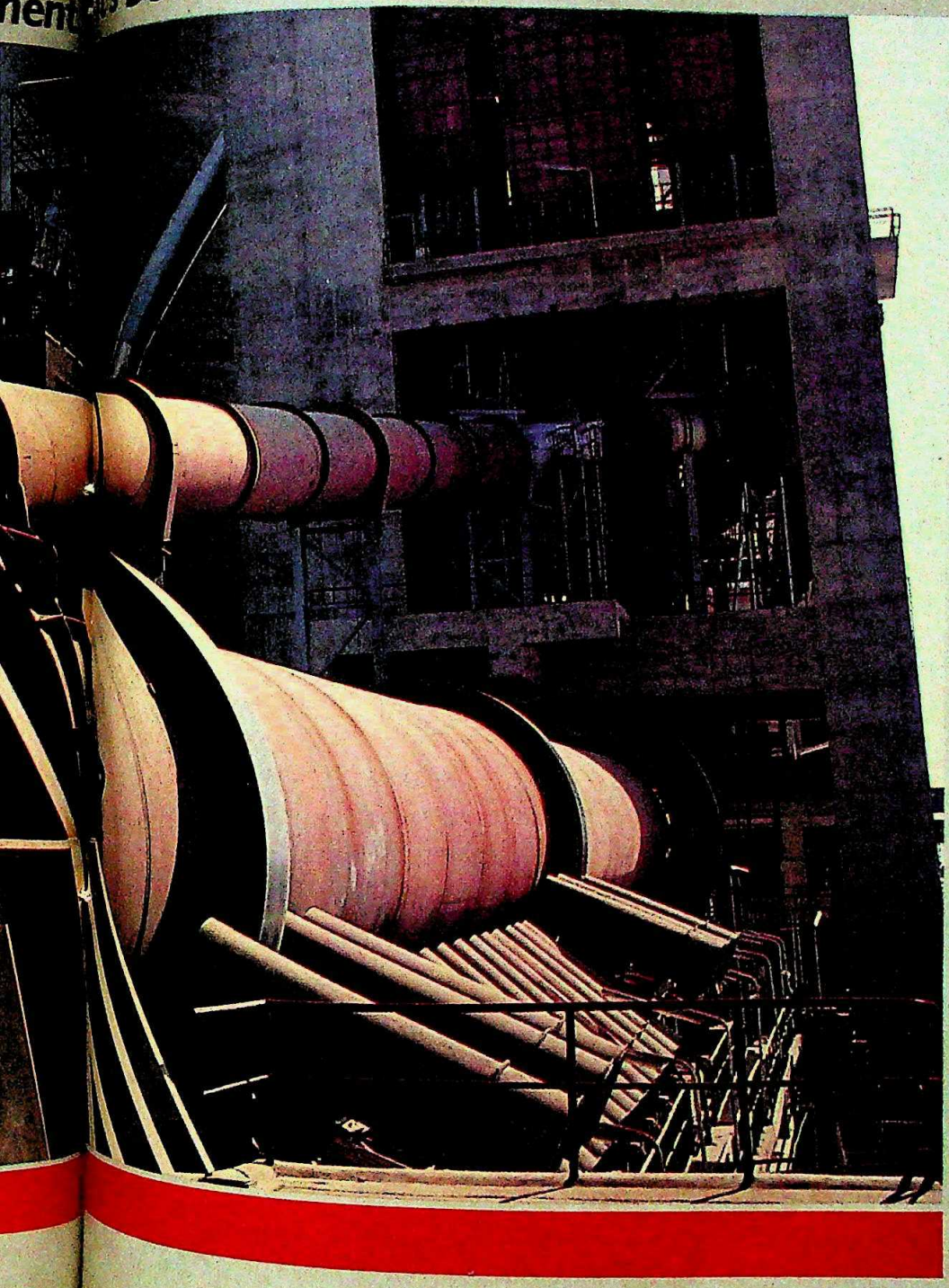

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might finally pay. The buzz now is that UCC pertly upped the ante in fresh negotiations this year. Starting once again at $350 million, it has gradually gone as far as $500 million. Meanwhile, the cross-petitions raise the basic issues involved in the case, so that a judgement by this bench would virtually settle the case. Possibly with an awareness of this, Attorney-General K. Parasaran, arguing for the Union of India, asked the court to obtain an undertaking from UCC that it would abide by the court's ruling. The court has reserved its ruling while continuing with hearings. Carbide only submits to the jurisdiction of Indian courts because a US court, before which the Government had initially filed its $3 billion suit for damages, required it to. But nothing stops it from challenging Indian judgements before home courts. A moot point is that if the suit is granted, such a huge amount could only be got through attachment of UCC's assets in the States.

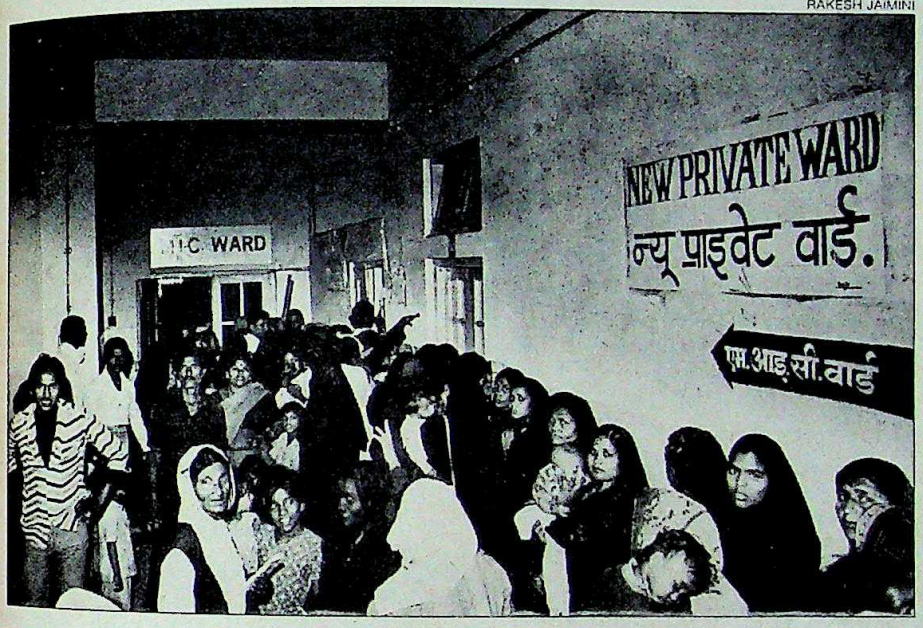
Union Carbide does not admit its liability. It maintains the tragedy was the result of sabotage by a disgruntled employee at the plant and that in any case the plant was not operated by it but by UCIL. It argues that the orders for interim damages "prejudge" the case and amount to a decree without trial. Argued a UCC lawyer: "Let us say for a moment we pay the compensation and later the court establishes that the accident was caused by sabotage. Then will the Government repay the money?"

The Government's case, accepted by the high court, is that UCC's liability is obvious in the light of the Supreme Court's landmark judgement in a case against Shri Ram Chemicals—from whose Delhi plant there had earlier been a toxic leak. The court held the owner of a hazardous unit automatically liable if "harm results to anyone on account of an accident", even if it was no fault of the owner's. Further, it held that compensation should hinge on the ability to pay. The judgement, the last delivered by Chief Justice P.N. Bhagwati before he retired, had clear implications for the Bhopal case, which is even referred to at the beginning of the judgement. Carbide's arguments against Bhagwati's judgement before the present bench will be closely followed by all hazardous industries in India.

Also crucial to Carbide's case is the Government's failure to properly process victims' claims for damages. UCC demands to be told in court the details of the damage, treatment and needs of each claimant. The Government claims it has mobilised 320 doctors to examine and document 280,000 cases thus far.

However, victims and social activists complain that the Government's efforts have been chaotic and inadequate. Basic questions have been raised by two members of a committee set up by the Supreme Court to look into the relief and rehabilitation efforts in Bhopal after a writ petition was filed against the Government by some activists in 1985. The minority report of the two non-official members discusses the lack of post mortem arrangements for deaths even three years and more after the disaster, the lack of research into systemic poisoning of victims, the persistent confusion over treatment, the gross inadequacy of rehabilitation schemes, and poor maintenance of medical records. The minority report indicts studies by the Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) as uncoordinated and even unscientific. One sample study actually came up with a mortality rate lower than the national average, and much closer to European standards. As a result of such bungling, doctors in Bhopal are still not clear what treatment should be given.

RAKESH JAIMINI



Doctors in Bhopal are still not clear about the treatment. Controversy surrounds prescription of sodium thiosulphate, an antidote for cyanide poisoning, about which Carbide changed its mind.

A major controversy surrounds the prescription of sodium thiosulphate, an antidote for cyanide poisoning. Carbide initially recommended it, but withdrew that within a few weeks. By then, the ICMR had recommended it but only after a prescribed urine test. However, four years on, the ICMR has still not released definitive findings on the efficacy of this treatment. "Our frustrations with the Government in Bhopal cannot be understood by anyone outside Bhopal," says Dr Anil Sadgopal, one of the minority members of the Supreme Court committee. Their report recommended a high-profile National Medical and Rehabilitation Committee to control the chaotic relief and medical efforts.

The court is yet to rule on this recommendation. Meanwhile, it is hearing the compensation case. Whichever way it decides, though, there seems little immediate hope for the wretched victims of Bhopal. Even if the interim compensation is upheld, UCC is unlikely to cough it up immediately. For that, the company's assets would have to be chased through the US courts. The light at the end of the tunnel is very hazy.

—N.K. SINGH and DAVID DEVADAS
with AMRIT KAKARIA in New York

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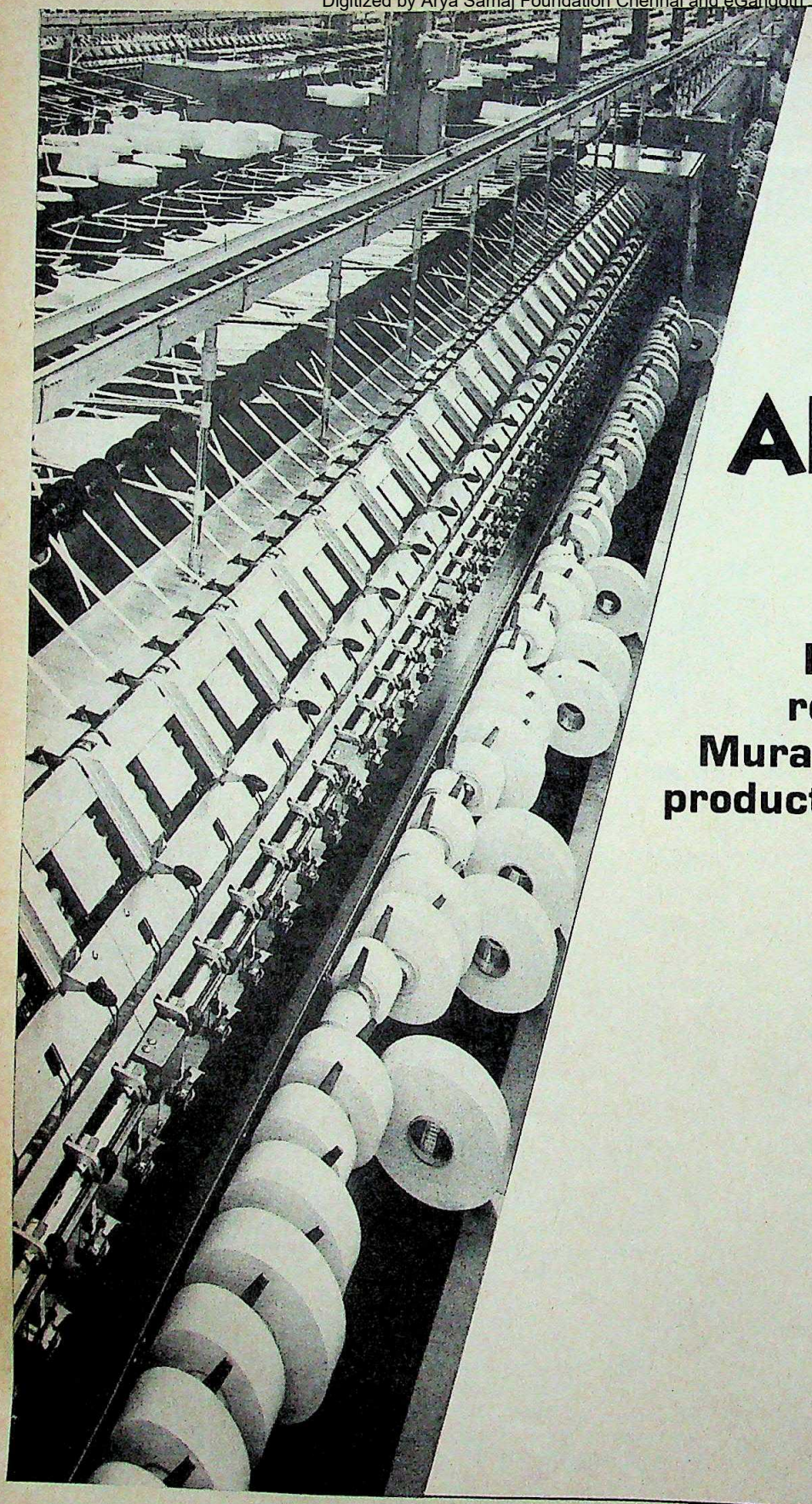

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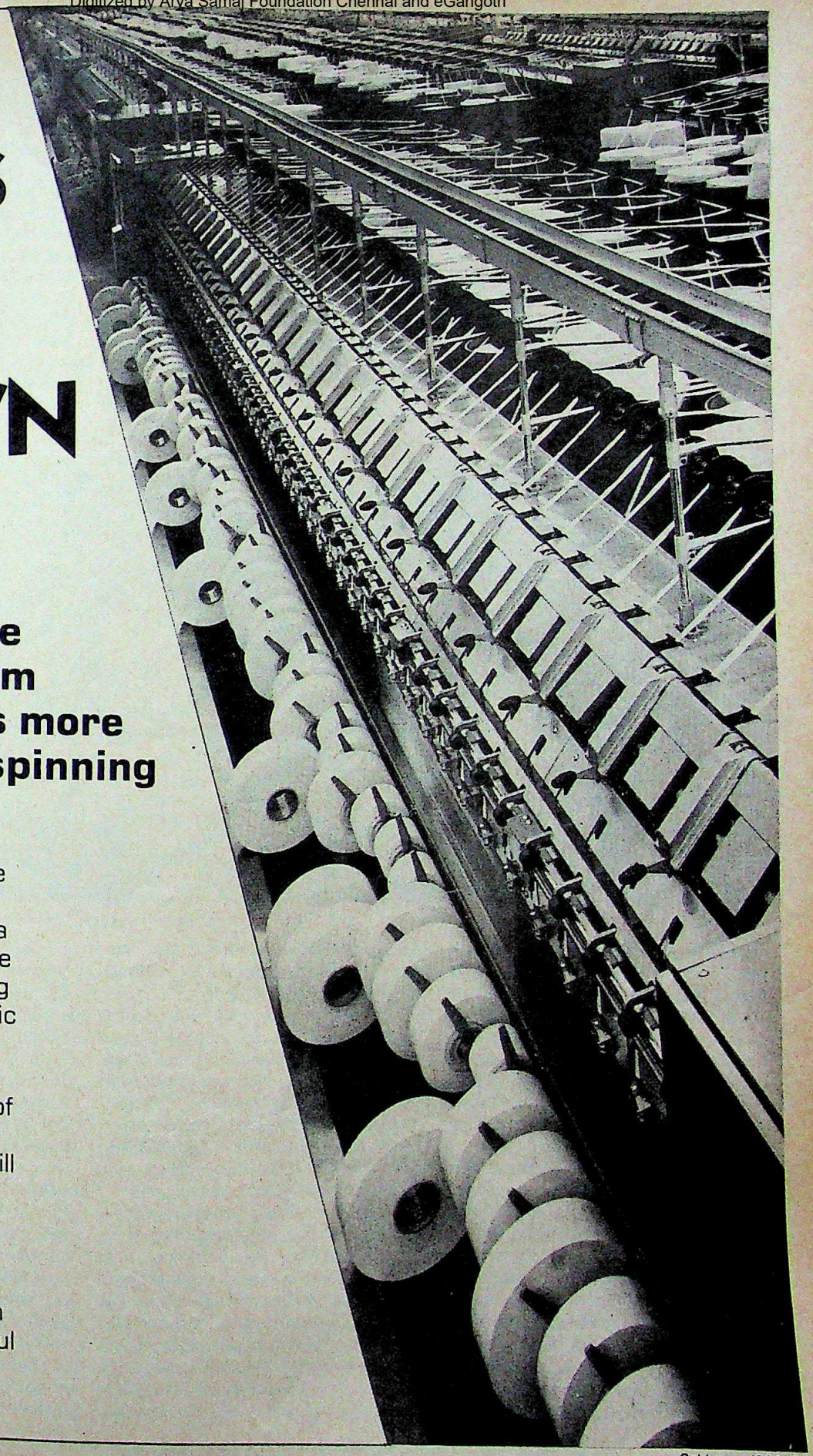

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THE OPPOSITION

Divided They Stand

The labyrinthine route to unity winds on

"Their politics changes every day....The Opposition talks different things in a span of 100 hours."

Rajiv Gandhi at the recent Red Fort rally.

OPPOSITION parties seemed determined to vindicate the prime minister. Last fortnight, as the process for the merger of Janata and the Lok Dal into one unified Janata Dal began, it created more confusion about the identity of the new opposition line-up. Instead of formally launching a new party, the faction leaders were struggling to maintain their own identities. The paradox was underlined as, instead of one signboard of the new party, feuding partymen put up two flags and two signboards at the Janata Party's sprawling headquarters on New Delhi's Jantar Mantar Road.

As the factional war climaxed, the November 15 deadline for the merger of all the parties into one passed unnoticed. And it was again clear to the Janata Dal President Vishwanath Pratap Singh that he had to cross many hurdles before he could succeed in putting together anything resembling his promised credible national alternative to the Congress(I).

Barring Haryana—where Devi Lal's strongarm tactics kept partymen in line—there was no state where a dispute over the Janata Dal did not take place. To begin with, instead of requesting the Election Commission to allot a symbol to the newly launched party, a rebellious section of the Janata Party wrote a letter against it. Internal dissensions and confusion reached peaks of absurdity in Bhopal where the Janata Dal flag was unfurled at the offices of three parties—the Janata, the Lok Dal and the Jan Morcha. Chuckled a Jan Morcha leader in Bhopal: "Let us see which one of us gets formal recognition as the Janata Dal."

The crisis was not confined to the Janata Party. The Lok Dal too split vertically, with a majority of the cadres and leaders supporting Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal after "removing" H.N. Bahuguna from the party's presidentship. While the Devi Lal faction declared itself a part of the Janata Dal, Bahuguna decided to stay out for the time being.

After the impetus given to unity at the Bangalore Foundation Convention in October, the national Opposition again appeared to be falling apart. Trouble began soon after the convention when V.P. Singh tried pressuring the Lok Dal and the Janata Party to summon meetings of their national councils for the ratification of the merger. Since Bahuguna was opposed to a merger, he refused to call the meeting. This gave a section of the Janata leadership an excuse to postpone their own—on the plea that they alone would not ratify the merger if the Lok Dal did not.

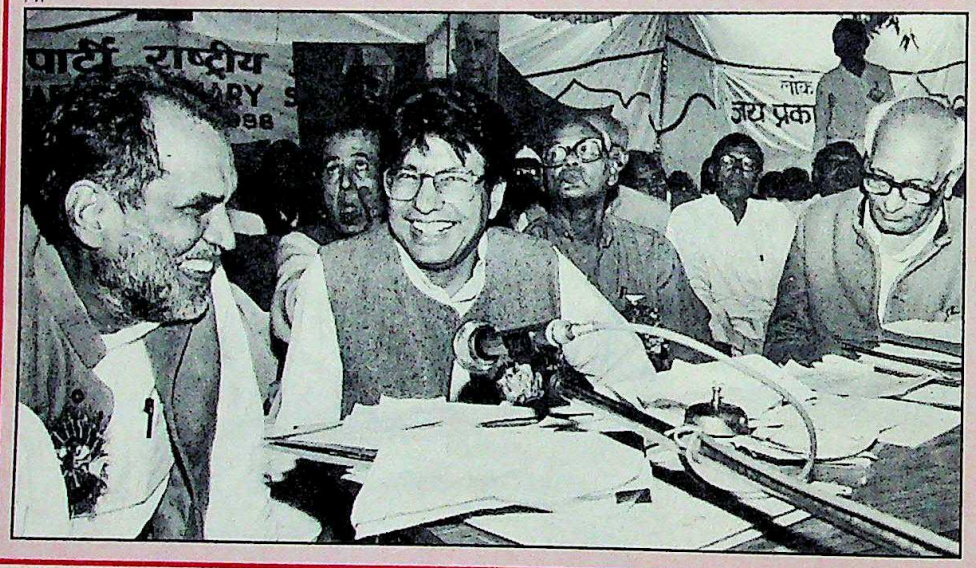
Seeing his dream of unity dissolve, spurred Devi Lal into action. He forced the issue on Bahuguna by calling his party's national convention, passing a unanimous resolution dissolving the Lok Dal and merging it with the Janata Dal. As expected, Bahuguna and his handful of supporters boycotted the meet, giving the Jat leader cause to declare: "Now it is clear who are the enemies of opposition unity. Those who have stayed away have done so on the behest of the ruling party."

Bahuguna was in no less a belligerent mood: "Devi Lal personifies today's political mood. No issues. No ideology. No debate. No understanding of people's actual aspirations. These people are creating an infertile and void atmosphere in national politics. It will not help the country at all."

If the Lok Dal provided the polemics, the Janata produced the fireworks. When delegates for the party's national council meeting assembled on November 18, they were already divided into pro-merger and anti-merger factions. While detractors of the merger were led by people like Subramaniam Swamy, Syed Shahabuddin and Yashwant Sinha (all MPs) who were unlikely to get any office in the new party, the pro-merger forces were led by Madhu Dandavate and former Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde.

Action began as soon as former Janata president Chandra Shekhar moved the merger resolution. Skirmishes broke out

PTI



It was only after four hours of sabre-rattling that the Janata Party's national council finally approved a rag-tag resolution.

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between the factional leaders and both Chandra Shekhar and Dandavate had to go up to the workers and pacify them. Heated debate followed on even minor issues like whether the portrait of the late Charan Singh should be adorning the wall behind the dais. As the meeting was being presided over by Charan Singh's son Ajit Singh, his opponents declared that other stalwarts such as Jayaprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev had been ignored. A harried Chandra Shekhar offered to make amends.

Instead of solving the problems, the meeting had only added to the bitterness. Adding to the absurdity of the situation was the fact that the anti-merger tirade came from the Karnataka faction of the party that was pro-Chandra Shekhar—who had moved the resolution to merge. It was only after four hours of sabre-rattling that the national council finally approved a rag-tag resolution.

THE rebels were clearly in no mood to say aye. Senior leaders like Indubhai Patel and Delhi state Janata chief Viresh Pratap Chowdhury even stopped Hegde's supporters from putting up the new Janata Dal signboard at the Janata Party headquarters. A visibly despondent Dandavate later said: "Political parties cannot merge as companies. There are always loose ends which are tied later. Even during the formation of Janata Party in 1977 formalities were carried out after the elections."

As if this was not bad enough, the pro-Chandra Shekhar leaders wrote to party chief Ajit Singh that the merger could not take place unless the Janata was formally dissolved and other related issues sorted out. Said Swamy: "You cannot put the cart before the horse. It was decided in Bangalore that all the formalities will be over before the merger. We want a blue-print of the house before it is built."

It was evident that Swamy and company were not alone in their attempts at scuttling the merger moves. Sources close to V.P. Singh alleged that Chandra Shekhar was pulling the strings from behind the scenes, in order to pressure the Janata Dal leadership into giving him a bigger piece of the cake. Accordingly, his supporter Shahabuddin wrote to Ajit Singh demanding:

► That the constitution of the Janata Party be amended before the merger and a time-bound schedule for party elections be announced for primary and national level functionaries.

► The procedure for the constitution of district and state level units of the Janata Dal and the leadership of the Janata Dal group in Parliament and state legislative parties be announced before the merger.

► Ad-hoc panels of Janata Dal office-bearers be announced by Ajit Singh at the Janata Party's convention.

Interestingly, the letter was dated November 3 but was delivered to Ajit Singh only after the convention. It was released to the press when Shahabuddin saw that none of his suggestions were accepted by the leadership.

The timing of the letter was significant as V.P. Singh was scheduled to announce the executive of the Janata Dal soon after the convention. The Chandra Shekhar group were obviously trying to bargain over their position in the Janata Dal before endorsing the merger; their aim being to put as many of their men as possible on the national executive and the ad hoc panel of the new party.

The shenanigans naturally left the rank and file of the Opposition demoralised. Lamented Harikesh Bahadur, Janata Party general secretary: We are unable to sacrifice small considerations for bigger ones. Time is slipping out of our hands in these unnecessary trivialities".

Surprisingly, both V.P. Singh and Devi Lal—who must be in competition for the title of the most stoic politician in India—remained undeterred. While V.P. Singh decided to tour the country and hold public meetings and consultations with those "who actually matter", Devi Lal vented his frustrations by hitting Bahuguna where it hurt. He won over Bahuguna's supporters—led by Mulayam Singh Yadav—in his home bastion of Uttar Pradesh and even eroded his base in Rajasthan.

In the spirit of never say die, both V.P. Singh and Devi Lal also began meetings with Chandra Shekar and others to finalise the names of the Janata Dal's office-bearers. Declared V.P. Singh: "I am a born optimist. People want unity and it will come." He wouldn't risk predicting by when. But he must be praying every day for things to fall in place before the public—already bored and irritated by the Opposition's absurd contortions—decided to dump it yet again.

—PRABHU CHAWLA with PANKAJ PACHAURI

The Devi Lal faction decided to remove Bahuguna from the presidentship and resolved to merge into Janata Dal.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

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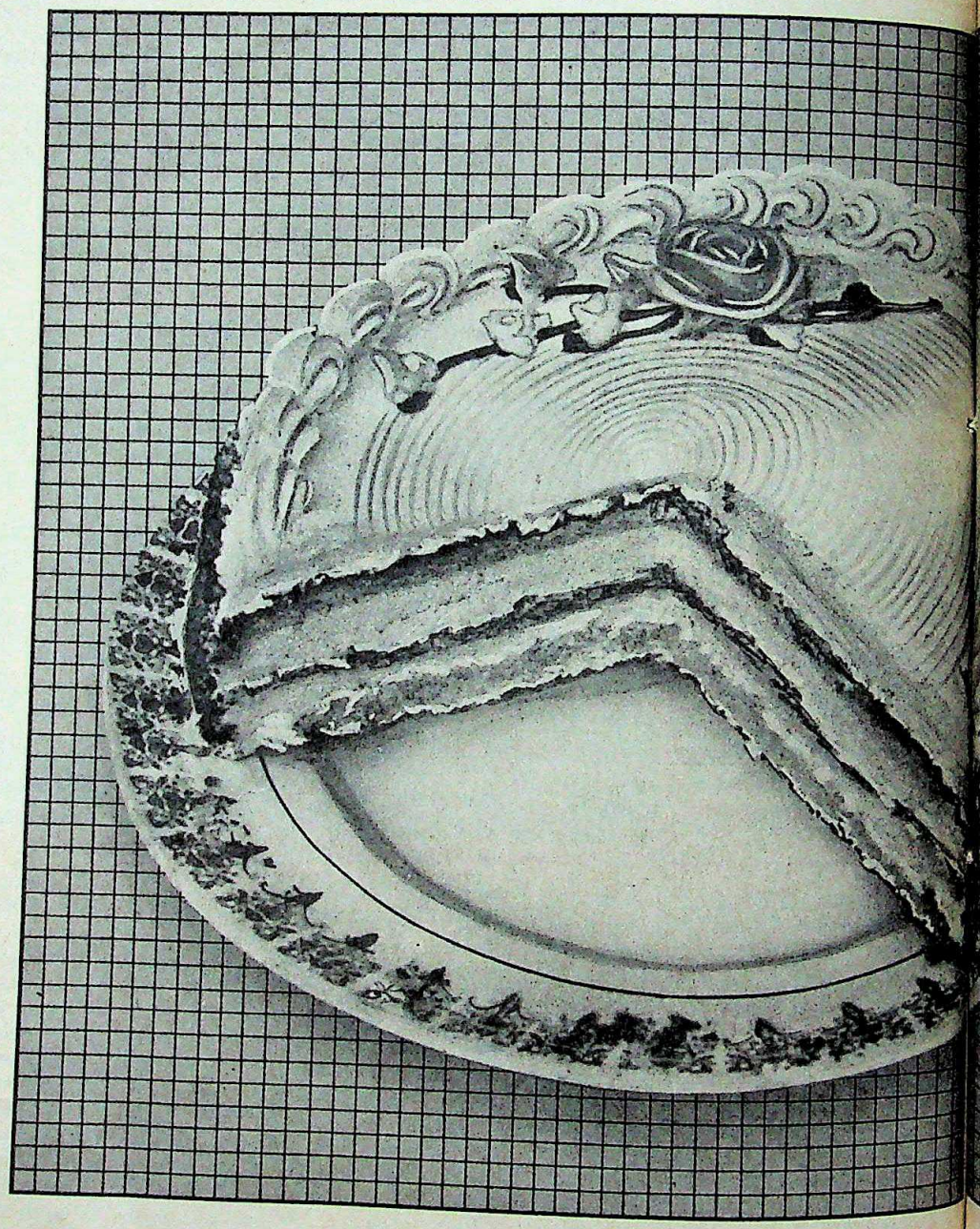

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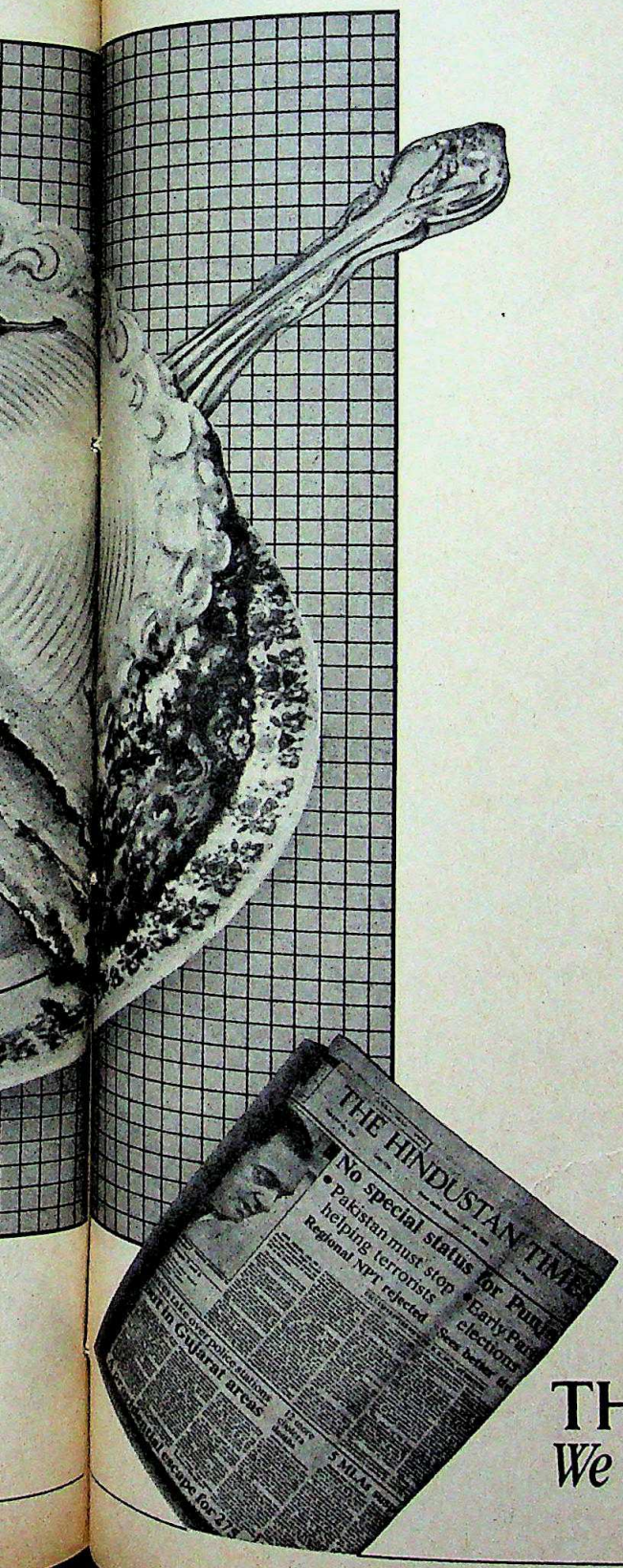

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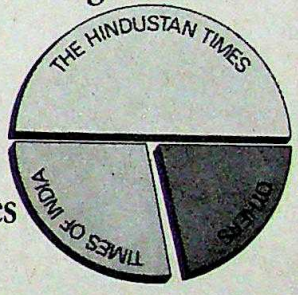

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BIHAR

Secular Act

Jamaat adopts liberal stance

"Instead of behaving in an unconcerned manner, take deep and wide interest in the problems of the country and try with every nerve to ameliorate the situation."
—Maulana Abul Lais Islahi Nadvi Ameer, Jamaat-e-Islami Hind on November 5, 1988 in Delhi.

TO those familiar with the religious ideology of the Jamaat, these words were tantamount to high apostasy. Ever since—and long before—India's Independence, the organisation has dreamed of establishing *Hukumat-e-Illahia* (rule of God) in India. And Nadvi had once sermonised that to cooperate with secular institutions was *haraam* (banned in Islam).

So what came as a shocking surprise was not just Nadvi's out-of-character posture but also a related nationwide movement by the Jamaat under the new banner of *Nafrat Mitao, Insaniat Bachao* (eradicate hatred, save humanity).

The apparent shedding of its fundamentalist and, as many would say, communal skin by the Jamaat did not go unnoticed in official and political circles. In several districts of Bihar, for example, Jamaat leaders invited non-Muslim intellectuals for discussions on sensitive communal issues. In Munger they were offered a dharamshala for their function, and in Ranchi, Deputy Commissioner Sajjal Kumar Chakarvarty turned up to inaugurate the seminar. Jagannath Mishra, MP, who as chief minister of Bihar, had put a ban on RSS and Jamaat activities in public places, sent a letter, saying such efforts were the "need of the hour".

Similar functions, known by their sponsors as "peace forums", were also organised in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Said Jamaat spokesman Shafi Moonis: "All this is part of our national programme against communalism."

But obviously much larger issues were at stake. It is hardly possible for a hidebound fundamentalist organisation to begin smoking the communal peace-pipe overnight without provocation or incentive. The Jamaat's changed posture, insiders reveal, is the product of some hard and realistic thinking. Try as it might, the organisation has never succeeded in influencing the political process or increasing its own strength. The membership now is only about 4000, due mainly to the selfless commitment and sacrifice it expects from its members. Among other things a member must renounce his self-will, live as a servant of God only and must be guided by the Quran and the Sunna (the way prescribed by the Prophet).

Now, with elections a year away and the disenchanted Muslim vote largely up for grabs, Jamaat leaders feel they can increase their influence within the community by adopting a more flexible and essentially political stand and propagating the "humanism" of the Jamaat rather than the pipe dream of *Hukumat-e-Illahia*.

In fact, Jamaat members were not even allowed to exercise their franchise in past elections. But younger adherents have been pressing the organisation to jettison what they regard as religious obscurantism. And despite stiff resistance from hardcore elements, the Jamaat has officially adopted a more liberal stance. Its newly-issued "policy and programme" now says that the term "democratic and constitutional" includes parliamentary politics. "The Jamaat may, therefore, take part in elections at an appropriate time subject, however, to conditions laid down for the purpose."

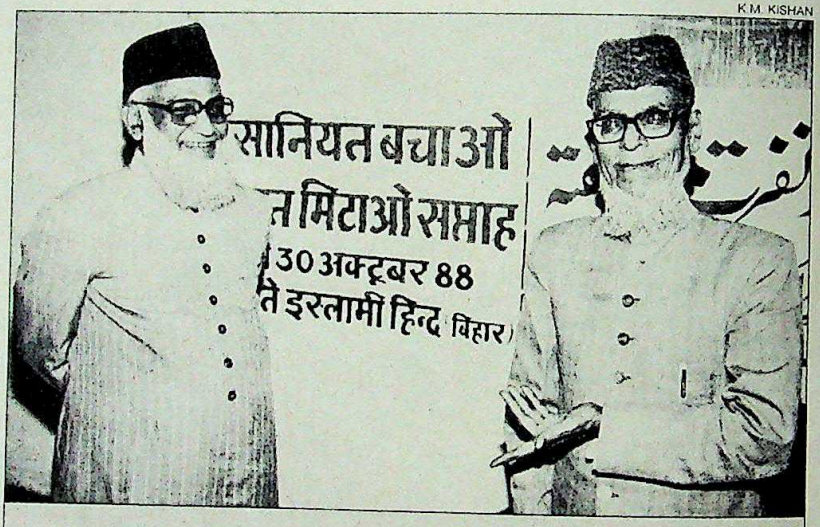
As Nadvi explains: "In principle, Jamaat is only against direct participation in the elections. It does not want to set up its own candidates because the atmosphere is still not conducive for this." Adds Jamaat Secretary Maulana Sirajul Hassan: "Under the present policy, Jamaat would allow its members to vote for candidates in a selective manner and would not support any party anti-Muslim in character."

Until this new chapter in its life, the Jamaat's role has been by and large that of an aggressive protector of Muslim "identity". The Jamaat helped create the Muslim Personal Law Board a decade ago when demands were being raised for a uniform civil code, but later withdrew from it. It also helped establish the All-India Muslim Majlis-e-Mashawarat to ensure that Islamic teaching was preserved in important centres in Uttar Pradesh. The Jamaat publishes several dailies and weeklies in many languages and its youth wing is said to be the biggest such Islamic body in any country.

But the Jamaat established its new credentials publicly by the restrained role it played in the recent developments in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid imbroglio. The Jamaat's Secretary-General Afzal Hussain is a member of the Babri Masjid Coordination Committee, the convenor of which is Syed Shahabuddin. Jamaat leaders openly proclaim that they prevented the committee from taking the matter to the

Nadvi (right) with Hassan: *glasnost?*

K.M. KISHAN



The apparent shedding of its communal skin by the Jamaat is perhaps aimed at tightening its grip on the electoral process, which it had earlier shunned.

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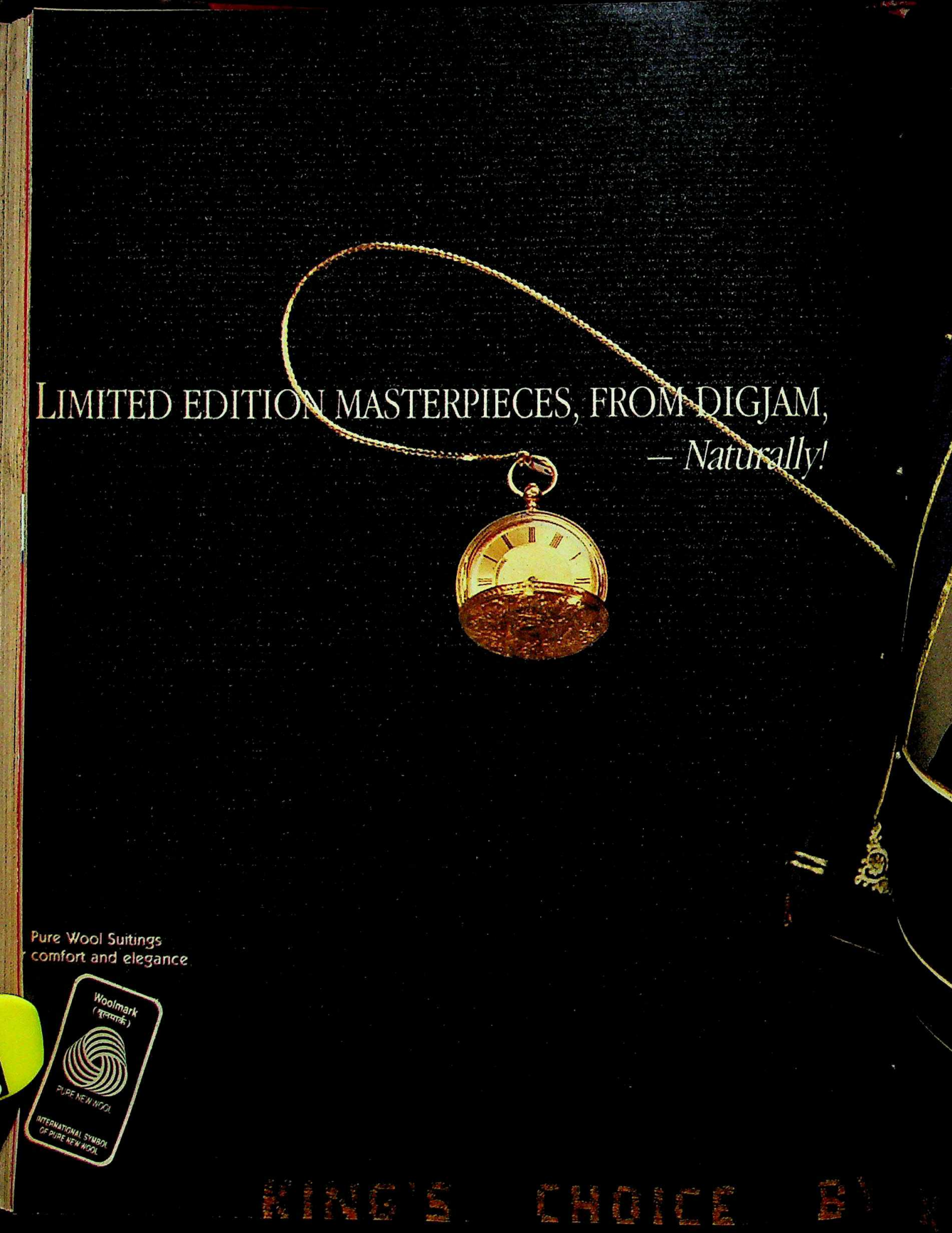
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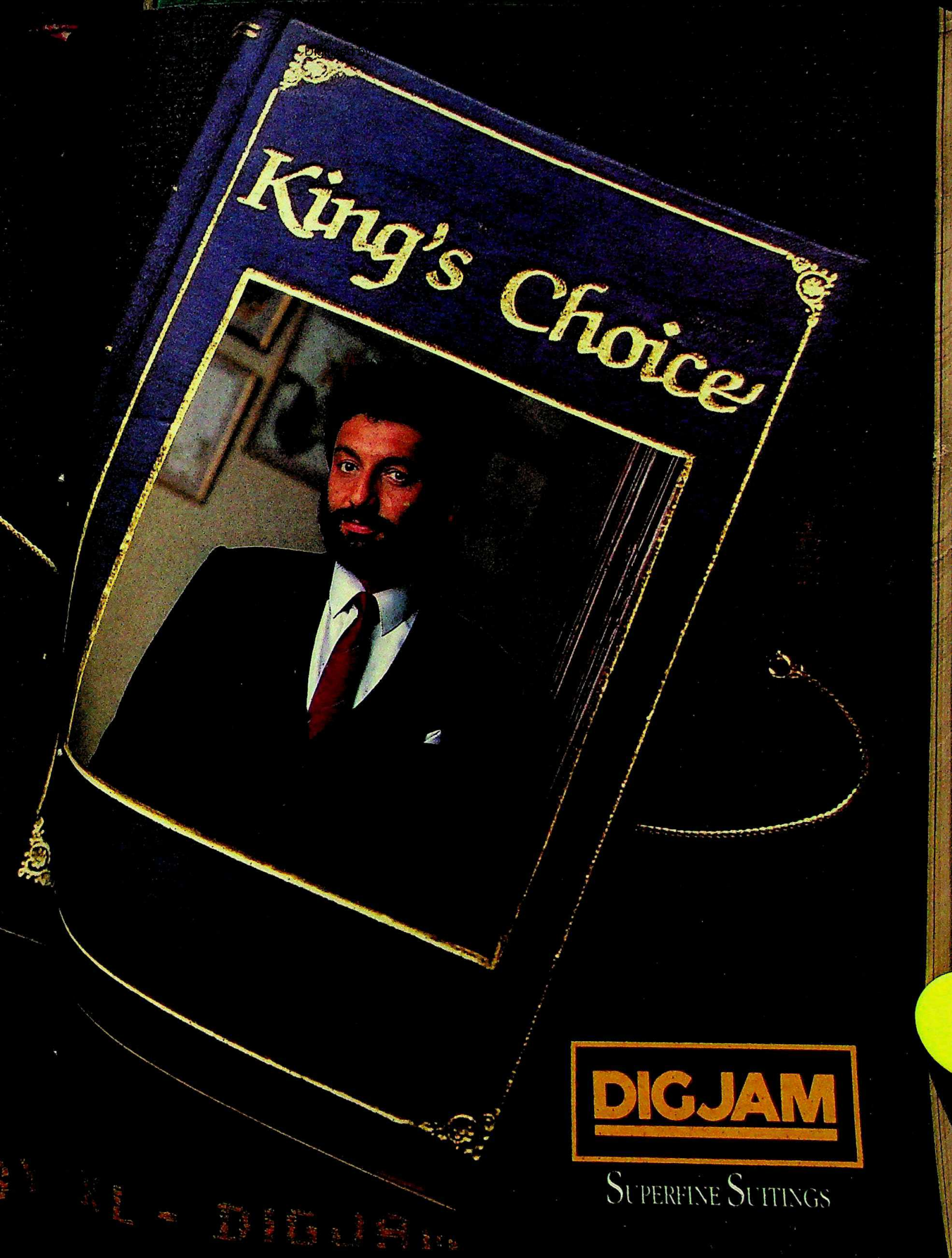
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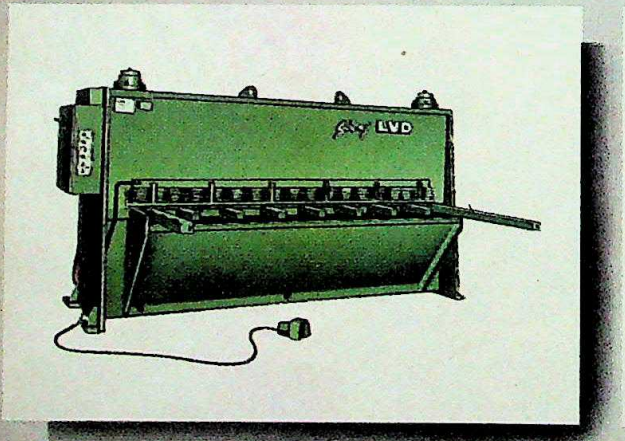

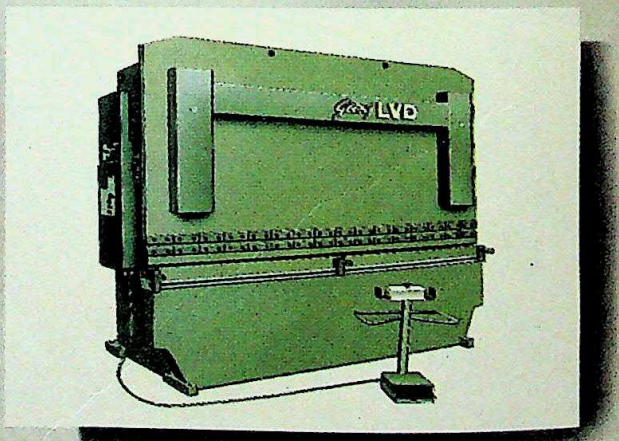

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streets. The committee's various calls to its constituent members to march to Ayodhya were stymied by the Jamaat which told its members that public agitation was un-Islamic. And Maulana Nadvi even went to the extent of saying that if the Hindu side was able to prove that the controversial site was, indeed, the birth-place of Rama, the Muslims could hand over the shrine to them.

But Jamaat planners say that the organisation's face-lift is also calculated to bring in new members. While attracting Muslim elitists and intellectuals into its fold, the Jamaat, its own leaders admit, have neglected the economic and social needs of the Muslim masses. "Our appeal must now be turned towards the masses. We must convince others not to think of us as a communal group," said a spokesman.

Part of the reason behind the Jamaat's evolving strategy is the Government's recent announcement that it will seek a ban on the participation of communal organisations in electoral politics. But no matter what the Jamaat's intentions, the majority of Indians still view the Jamaat as a "communal" organisation seeking to destroy the democratic fabric and establish an Islamic order. Jamaat leaders recognise that shedding this image will involve a long-drawn struggle. Whether the conservatives will prevail again is in the realm of speculation. But for now the Young Turks are at the Jamaat's rudder and they firmly believe that their current *"Nafrat Mitao, Insaniat Bachao"* movement is a step in the right direction.

—FARZAND AHMED

BIHAR

Transfer Spree

Chaos in state bureaucracy

"I will put a brake on the transfer industry....I want to create a new work culture."

THE resolve Bhagwat Jha Azad had tried to project when he mouthed those words soon after taking over the chief ministership of anarchic Bihar, today lies in a shambles. And the state bureaucracy that he had wished to discipline, has, instead—in nine months of his stewardship—travelled from chaos to a state of near-collapse. The reasons, keeping in mind Azad's past assertions, are ironic: frequent, and as senior officials say, senseless transfers and postings by the chief minister-Chief Secretary Arun Pathak combine.

In a bizarre turn of events at the state secretariat last fortnight, Education Commissioner R.S. Tiwari challenged his sudden transfer to the post of excise commissioner and refused to hand over charge. This was not all. A.U. Sharma, named as Tiwari's successor, was on "protest leave" and J.L. Arya, excise commissioner, had not yet returned from his leave.

Tiwari pointed out that it would be better to at least wait for Arya to come back. But an angry Personnel Secretary M.L. Mazumdar sent a letter informing Tiwari that if he did not hand over charge immediately, he would be considered relieved of his responsibilities. Tiwari's colleagues assert that the state Government has created a precedent by transferring a commissioner-rank officer without even consulting the minister concerned. Yet Pathak was unperturbed, declaring non-committally: "Everything is normal."

Pathak is obviously no stranger to shuffling bureaucrats like a pack of cards as he himself was made chief secretary after superseding at least 22 IAS officers. If the state's IAS officials are a demoralised lot, so too are the IPS men. They have been particularly incensed at the appointment of J.M. Quraishi as director-general of the state police some months back as he is not from the Bihar cadre.

Instead of curbing the political brokers who treat bureaucrats like puppets on a string, Azad has followed a policy of appeasement and created six posts each of IAS and IPS officials equivalent to the rank of chief secretary and director-general of police. "I have tried my best to adhere to the established rules. Some transfers, however, have to be made purely for administrative reasons," said he. But the fact that he has not restored authority to transfer bureaucrats to the Cabinet—which his predecessor Bindeshwari Dubey had given to officers close to him—speaks for itself.

Thus officials continue to be transferred with bewildering rapidity. Some case histories:

► B.B. Lal was posted as revenue commissioner for just two months, after which he was made tourism commissioner—without the knowledge of his minister.

► S.N.P.N. Sinha was once on the Bihar State Sewerage Board. Since then, he has been excise commissioner, urban development commissioner, mines commissioner and even held a post on the public health engineering department.

► Within six months the Government posted five commissioners to the Magadh range. None of them showed up. Finally, one T. Nandkumar agreed to take on the job.

There are other anomalies. Often, junior officers are sent to big districts while their seniors are given charge of smaller districts. And contrary to established norms, one IAS officer was even posted to his home district. The caste factor too continues to play its invidious role: collectors of 31 of the state's 39 districts are either Brahmins or Kayasths. Even worse, five officers were made collectors despite corruption cases against them in the Lok Ayukta.

Azad clearly treats bureaucrats with the same disdain he has meted out to most of his partymen—resulting in the creation of a large dissident lobby. And as long as bureaucrats are shunted around like excess baggage, Azad's claims of bringing order to Bihar, will remain just that—empty claims.

—FARZAND AHMED

BHAGWAT JHA AZAD

Senior officials are up in arms against what they claim are senseless transfers by the chief minister-chief secretary combine.

ARUN PATHAK

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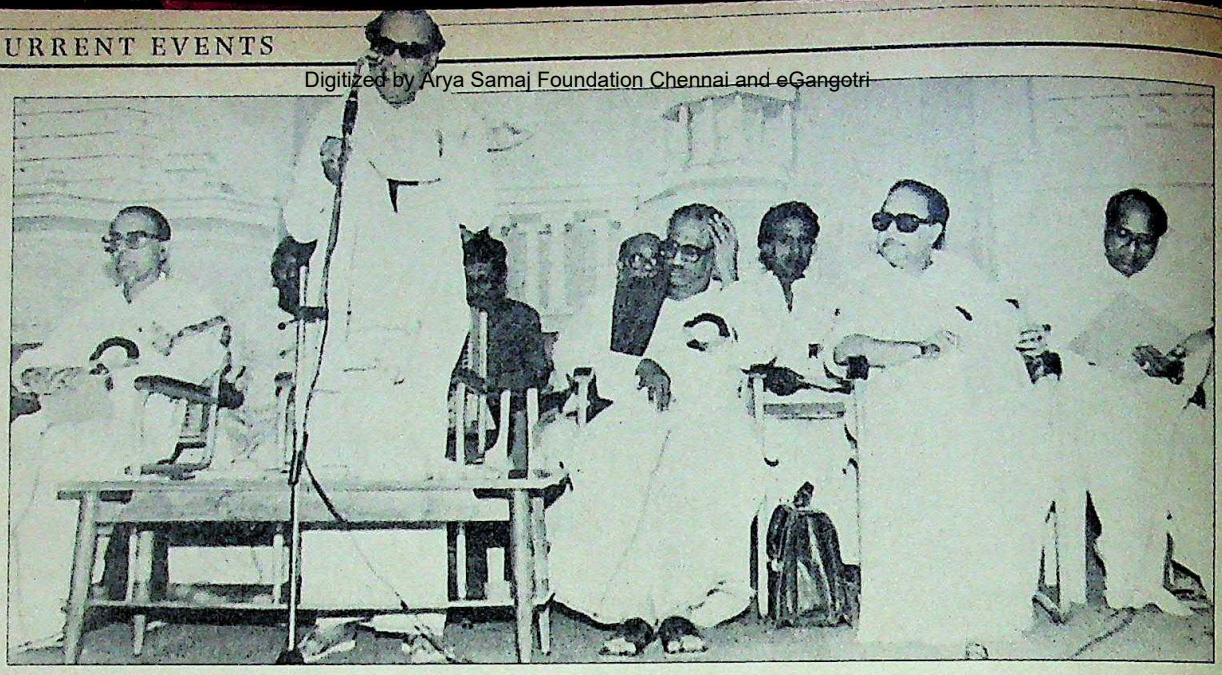

Karunanidhi addressing the DMK council meet

TAMIL NADU

Counter Attack

DMK galvanised into action

THE charge of the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress(I) brigade in Tamil Nadu, has galvanised the DMK into action. Determined to catapult his party to the centre-stage before the January polls, the tenacious Muthuvel Karunanidhi has at last rolled up his sleeves and plunged headlong into the electoral battle. V. Gopalasamy, the party's election strategist summed up the mood in the DMK camp when he declared: "Rajiv has attacked the state like Goliath but a small David in the form of our leader Karunanidhi will defeat him with the help of a small stone."

As election fever gripped the state, the DMK convened it's *Pothukkauzhu* (general council meeting) last fortnight after nearly a year. At the two-day meet attended by 1,000 delegates, the party formalised its election agenda, began the selection of candidates and launched a series of cadre-based programmes.

Under the watchful eye of Karunanidhi, 30 speakers addressed this gathering of the DMK's inner-most circle. At the end of the 20-hour brainstorming session, the party had decided that with attack being the best form of defence, they would lauch a counter-offensive directed at the Congress(I).

As expected, much of the DMK's energy will be spent whipping up anti-north and anti-Hindi sentiments. It will also undoubtedly try embarrassing the Congress(I) by highlighting the discrimination against regional governments and the Sri Lankan imbroglio.

With personalities always having dominated state politics, Karunanidhi hopes to neutralise the Rajiv Gandhi-Governor P.C. Alexander combine with his son of the soil image. Said he: "Rajiv is misusing the state Government's money for his visits. The state spends over Rs 10 crore on each of his visits. Poor Tamilians are going to pay for his extravagant tours. We will expose him."

The DMK will no doubt be looking hard for excuses to discredit President's Rule—the Congress(I)'s trump card. But as the administration has undoubtedly been spruced up during Alexander's reign, it will find this no easy task. Yet Karunanidhi asserts confidently: "The mood of the public is for a change of government and the Congress Party cannot fool the people with tall claims about governor's rule—which is as corrupt as the MGR government."

With MGR's all-pervasive presence no longer pushing him into the background, Karunanidhi clearly hopes to be accepted by the same electorate which has determinedly kept him out of power for over a decade. He will therefore be going all out to ensure a victory at the hustings; in less than a week, he will address over 50 public meetings. Already, partymen have been instructed to paste over five lakh posters of Karunanidhi in all the major towns he will be visiting.

But the DMK's real strength lies in its grassroots cadres and from December 2 onwards, over 30,000 village leaders will fan out throughout the state and hold public meetings to "expose Rajiv's corrupt Government". For three days, they will hold over 500 public meetings.

While the Congress(I) is still groping in the dark about its electoral allies, the DMK has already set in motion the laborious but crucial process of candidate selection. In all, the party is expected to contest 190 of the 234 assembly seats, the rest going to its allies. So far 1,500 applications have been received and scores continue to pour in daily. A fee of Rs 500 from every aspirant and Rs 250 from each Scheduled Tribe applicant are expected to enrich party coffers—swelling funds from Rs 1 crore to Rs 4 crore.

Upset over the intense lobbying for party tickets, Karunanidhi has announced that he himself would choose each candidate: "I have ordered everyone to do away with the practice of bringing truck-loads of supporters to shore up claims. We will decide on the strength of the applications alone."

Son Stalin will no doubt be giving Karunanidhi a hand. President of the party's five-lakh-strong youth wing, Stalin is clearly being groomed as Karunanidhi's successor. Yet, as Arcot Veerasamy, the DMK headquarters' secretary explains: "Stalin has not been imposed by the leader. He has come up through hard work and the party appre-

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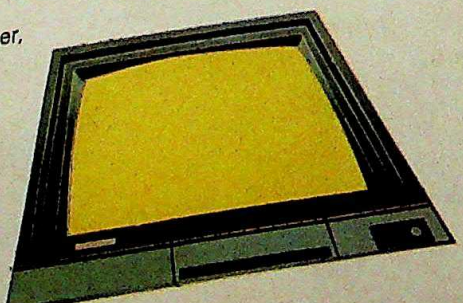

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ciates his organisational skill."

As far as organisational skills go, the Congress(I) was not doing so badly either. The party had planned the November 28 rally at Madras with the aim of obliterating from public memory the impressive launch of the National Front, hosted by the DMK.

With both the Congress(I) and the DMK skilfully playing the game of one-upmanship, the two factions of the AIADMK are getting somewhat sidelined. The Janaki faction in particular is in deep trouble. The merger with the breakaway group from the Jayalalitha faction has not yet materialised. More worrying, Janaki is in imminent danger of losing the support of cine idol Bhagyaraj—her party's sole crowd puller—who has threatened to leave as he claims that his fans' associations are being undermined. The Jayalalitha faction has fared better with its former treasurer Thirunavakarasu returning to the fold.

Yet, notwithstanding Janaki's emotional appeal and Jayalalitha's glamour, they are clearly not the favourites. It is the men—Karunanidhi and Rajiv—who auger to usurp MGR's crown.

—LALITHA DILEEP

KARNATAKA

Bommai Wins

But the group war continues

FOR Karnataka's cricket-loving chief minister S.R. Bommai, it must have been a case of nervous nineties. Caught in a crossfire between dissident strongman, H.D. Deve Gowda and former chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde, the chain smoking chief minister had a torrid time last fortnight even as his ministry completed 100 days in office on November 20. However, Bommai soon heaved a sigh of relief as he saw them both leave on separate trips abroad (Hegde for a family marriage and Gowda to study irrigation projects) resulting in a temporary cease-fire between the two camps.

The latest dissident upheaval was caused by the question of the presidentship of the state Janata Party. From the time it was worsted in the battle for the chief ministership by the Hegde camp, the Deve Gowda group has hungered after this office but the Hegde group has firmly held on to the post (the incumbent, M.P. Prakash, is a Hegde follower). Not only that, it also foisted Dr Jeevaraj Alva, another Hegde camper, as secretary-general of the party.

The Gowda group now claims that they had been promised the state presidentship for their nominee Siddaramaiah at the time Bommai became chief minister. This is hotly contested by the Hegde loyalists who say that the assurance was conditional to the unanimous election of Bommai as chief minister. Since Gowda contested against Bommai, the agreement lapsed. Hegde further aggravated the situation by declaring that Gowda had joined the Bommai Ministry unconditionally, and had in fact, pleaded and got his favourite portfolio: irrigation. An enraged Gowda retorted: "Who is Hegde now? It is the chief minister's prerogative to allot portfolios. Let Bommai say I asked for any ministry and I will reply to that."

SHYAM TEKWANI

Chief Minister S.R. Bommai (left) with Deve Gowda: temporary cease-fire

The Gowda group carried the battle to Delhi where the Janata Party National Council was meeting to endorse the decision to merge with the Janata Dal. The threat: unless Siddaramaiah was appointed state party president in place of Prakash, they would oppose the merger endorsement and retain the old Janata Party identity. But as it turned out, neither the Hegde group, nor the mentors of the rebels, Ajit Singh and Chandra Shekhar, paid heed to the threat despite dissenting speeches.

However, the dissident group claimed victory, pointing out that the Delhi meet had authorised Ajit Singh to complete the merger formalities. The formalities, they argued, included reorganising the state units of the new party. The dissidents were also jubilant that the merger endorsement at the National Council which was moved by Chandra Shekhar, was seconded by Chief Minister Bommai, and not Hegde. Sneered Deve Gowda: "Is this the same Hegde who said he did not recognise the National Council with Ajit Singh as leader? How come he attended the meeting of the same council?" The Hegde loyalists, however, took solace in the fact that the dissidents did not succeed in their immediate objective of wresting the state party presidentship.

Although caught in this seamy power struggle between the two groups, it was the shrewd Bommai who ultimately emerged as the quiet victor. By seconding the merger resolution, the chief minister moved front stage and out of the shadow of his predecessor, Ramakrishna Hegde. Then he proceeded to play his own card by declaring that V.P. Singh, and not Ajit Singh, would reconstitute the state units of the new party. In fact, throughout the crises, Bommai distinguished himself by maintaining a discreet silence while Gowda and Hegde traded charges. At the height of this slanging match, Bommai took time off to go and watch Navjot Singh Sidhu calmly handle the fiery Kiwi, Richard Hadlee. Admitting that his cigarette smoking had "increased dramatically" during the tense fortnight, Bommai finally found his confidence to say: "I am in total control now." But the calm may be short-lived. And the Karnataka fracas will continue to be an irritant in the move towards a larger opposition unity.

Although caught in this seamy power struggle between the two groups, it was the shrewd Bommai who ultimately emerged as the quiet victor.

—CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA

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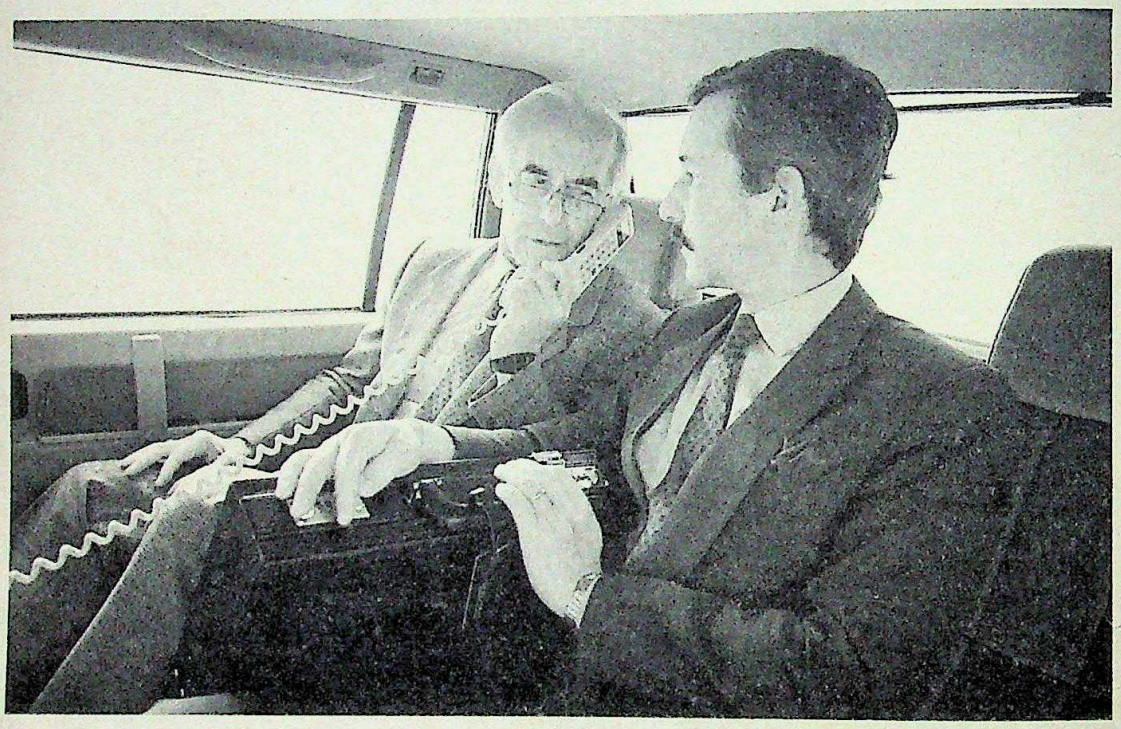

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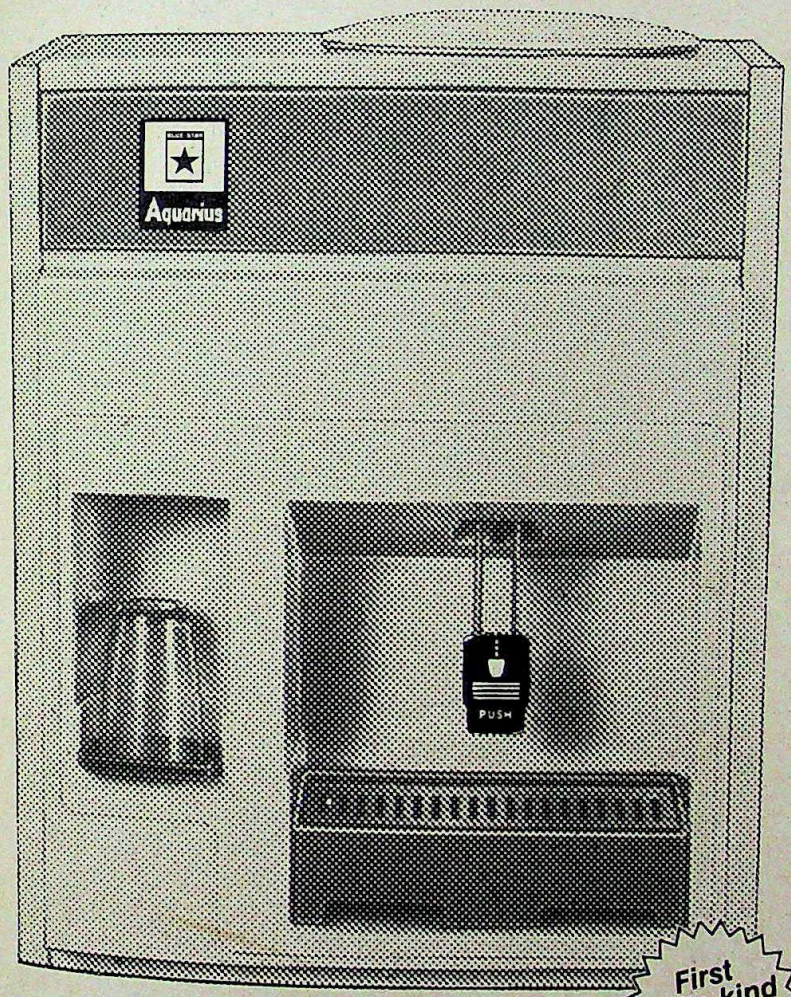

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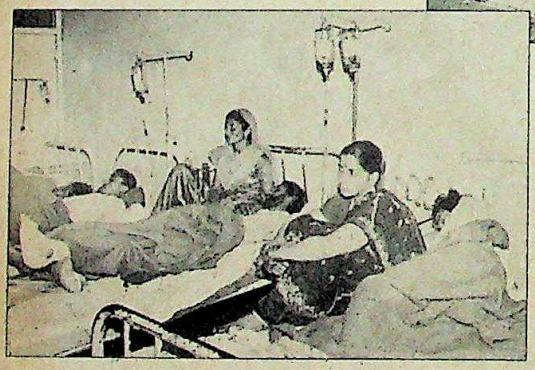
HARYANA

Killing Fields

The terrorists' new arena

INVIDIOUSLY and surely, the blood-crazed terrorists of Punjab are converting the adjacent state of Haryana into an arena for their deranged gun-play. Last fortnight they confirmed this trend with chilling insouciance—trundling through the main street of Kaithal town in a jeep, shooting down any bystander who took their fancy.

For five-year-old Mamta and her two siblings aged eight and three, this was the meaning of terrorism: a desperate struggle for life in government hospitals, and the death of a father. The small group returning from the market fell to a hail of bullets near the busy Chandana Gate at a time when electricity had tripped and the area was plunged into darkness. Darker still, if they survive, is the future for the three children. Bereft of their mother, they now rate as orphans.

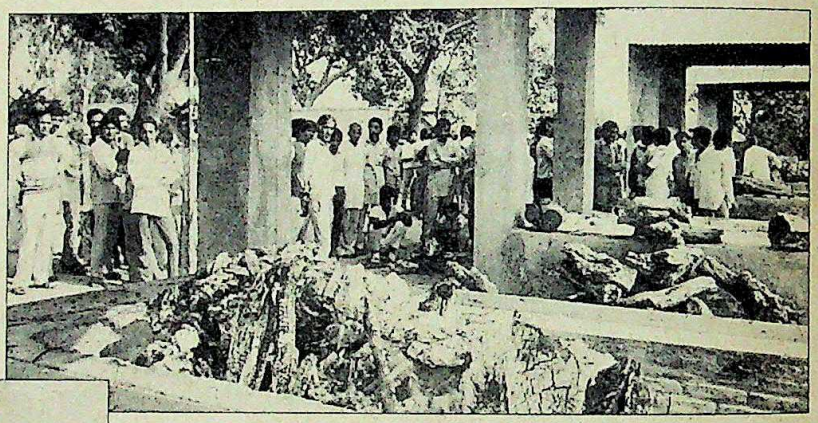


But they are not the only children to have been targets that evening. Among the 23 persons the terrorists mowed down were eight children below the age of 10 years. The victims did not subscribe to any distinctions of community or sex—among the killed were women, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs.

The operation consisted of strikes at three different places. The six or seven jeep-borne killers, their faces muffled, struck first at the suburban railway gate area, killing three persons and injuring a dozen. Then half-a-kilometre on, they gunned down eight people at Chandana Gate and, proceeding towards Pratap Gate and beyond, sprayed both sides of the road with their AK-47s, bringing down another dozen-odd people. Eyewitnesses reckon the terrorists fired 500 rounds and buildings on both sides of the road bear pock-marked testimony.

The most disturbing aspect of the Kaithal massacre was the fact that it was designed to provoke a communal clash on the sensitive Punjab-Haryana border. Next day being the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, thousands of Sikhs were to assemble at the town's Manji Sahib and Neem Sahib gurdwaras. Ten hours before the anniversary celebrations commenced, with hundreds of Sikhs already gathered in the gurdwaras, the killers struck with the obvious intent of inciting violence against their own community, thus sparking off a bloody chain of events.

The mass cremation at Kaithal; and some victims at the local hospital



The most disturbing aspect was that the killers struck with the obvious intent of inciting violence against their own community.

As if playing to this design, local Congress(I) leaders burnt Chief Minister Devi Lal's effigy demanding his resignation, even as thousands thronged the civil hospital and cremation ground. A procession, which Deputy Chief Minister Banarasi Das Gupta claimed was led by Congressmen, ransacked a gurdwara and roughed up some inmates.

The Centre, grabbing at every opportunity to downplay Devi Lal, had Union Home Minister Buta Singh calling up the chief minister to display concern. To back this up, four paramilitary battalions were despatched to Haryana—something the state Government had been long clamouring for.

Creditably, the people showed restraint. In fact the entire town, with a population of about one lakh, rose as a man to meet the crisis. Private doctors turned up at the civil hospital to help, and the medical stores, in a show of fine generosity, refused to charge money for medicines. Devi Lal said later that this money would be reimbursed.

Though this was the fourth major terrorist strike in Kurukshetra district this year, it is obvious that the police is still inadequately equipped to tackle the menace. The police was conjecturing that the terrorists escaped into Punjab through the narrow Khannauli link road from where the nearest inter-state border is a mere 15 km away. But in all earlier incidents, killers have been known to take shelter in local villages after committing the crime. (The Sikh population in these areas ranges from 40 to 60 per cent.)

Home Minister Sampat Singh claims the border areas have been combed three times and several dozen harbourers arrested. He also claims that all the earlier terrorist incidents in the state have been solved, the killers either arrested or killed. To beef up anti-terrorist steps, he says, an elite force of "brown cat commandos" has been raised by Haryana and the first four companies are on their way to being commissioned.

All this appears to be in order, for Haryana, with its communal dimensions, augurs to remain the hunting-ground for Punjab terrorists. And though sanity prevails today, every massacre sets up in its aftermath undercurrents of tension, which can at any time bring the situation to the brink of polarisation. —VIPUL MUDGAL in Kaithal

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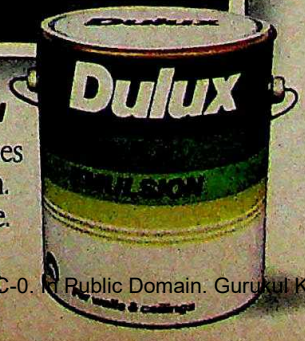

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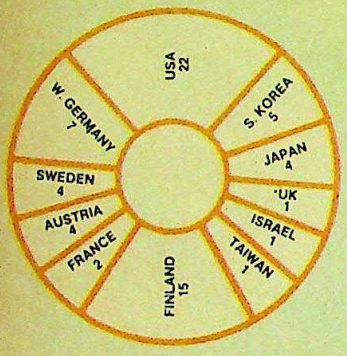

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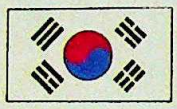

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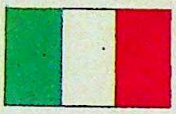

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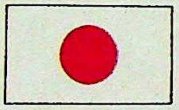

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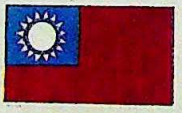

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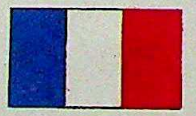

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HARYANA

Controversy over a Death

Congress(I) raises doubts about Supriya's demise

THE date: November 11. Time: 7.15 p.m. Place: Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal's sprawling farmhouse on the outskirts of Chautala village. According to Devi Lal's elder son, Rajya Sabha member Om Prakash Chautala—who happened to be in Chandigrah that evening—his younger daughter-in-law Supriya, elder son Ajay Singh, five visitors, and a servant named Durga were present at the farmhouse. The chief minister's wife Harki Devi had left for the family's ancestral home in the village about half-an-hour back. Devi Lal himself was at a restaurant a stone's throw away from the farmhouse. Chautala's younger son, 22-year-old Abhay Singh—married to Supriya, 19, since March 1987—had just left to meet his grandfather.

According to the version given out by Chautala, everyone except Supriya was present in the living-room. They heard the sound of what was presumed to be a Diwali cracker in the backyard. Five minutes later, Durga came rushing in, saying he had found Supriya in a pool of blood in her bedroom. She had accidently shot herself while unpacking a .32 bore licensed pistol from her husband's suitcase, claimed the family. A few hours later Supriya's parents arrived. At 9 the next morning, she was cremated.

Six hours later, a press release of the state Government announced that Mrs Supriya Singh had died of an accidental gunshot. At first, everyone left it at that.

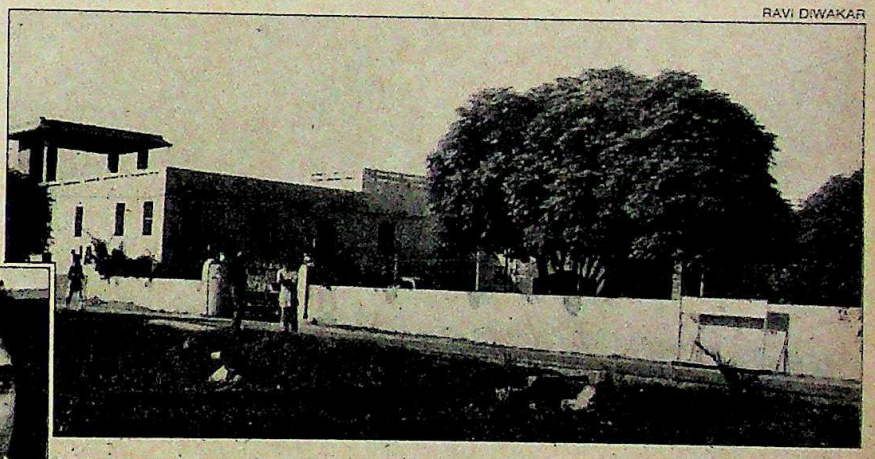
Then the Congress(I) zeroed in and created an uproar in Parliament, alleging Supriya had been murdered, and demanding an inquiry into the incident. The debate in the Lok Sabha became so heated that bangles and slippers were freely wielded. Congress(I) leaders in Haryana begun demanding a CBI inquiry; and the local press was abuzz with rumours. In Delhi, the Mahila Congress considered the death of Supriya sufficient cause for demonstrating in front of Home Minister Buta Singh's residence.

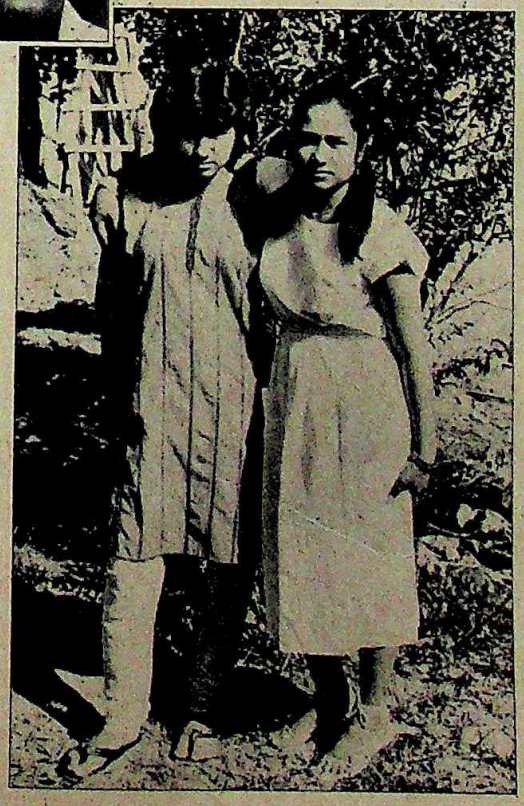
It was alleged that no post mortem had been conducted and the body cremated in great haste. "Devi Lal has committed a criminal offence by accompanying the body of his grand-daughter-in-law to the cremation ground," said Congress(I) leader Jagdish Nehra. "It is a clear case of obliteration of evidence." The state Home Minister Sampat Singh in turn asserted that Supriya's body had been cremated in the presence of her father Ram Chander Matoria and other relations. He also produced a post mortem document, which Nehra labelled as fabricated. On November 18 and 19, Nehra organised protest rallies in Dabwali town and Chandigarh to demand Devi Lal's resignation for failure to hold a CBI probe.

But while others have been agitating, the aggrieved party has remained satisfied with the version doled out by Haryana's first family. Supriya's father, Matoria, suspects no foul play at all, and has in fact offered his second daughter, Kanta—a minor, studying in class X—in marriage to Abhay (Supriya studied uptil class VIII and is said to have pressured her parents into giving her sister a better education). "It is well accepted under the customs of Jat families of Haryana to marry off minor daughters," says her father, a 76-year-old transporter of Rawatsar village.

Devi Lal's farmhouse; Abhay (inset); and Supriya (right) with Kanta

RAVI DIWAKAR





What is pertinent is that Matoria is a staunch Congress(I) supporter. Says Supriya's uncle, Chet Ram, also a Congress(I) man: "When Supriya got married we wanted to spend a lot of money. But Chaudhary Devi Lal did not let us and only a token Re 1 was given as dowry." Adds Matoria: "I am appalled at my partymen's reaction. Why would I marry my second daughter in the same family if I had suspected any foul play?"

But it is precisely this point—Abhay's alleged involvement with

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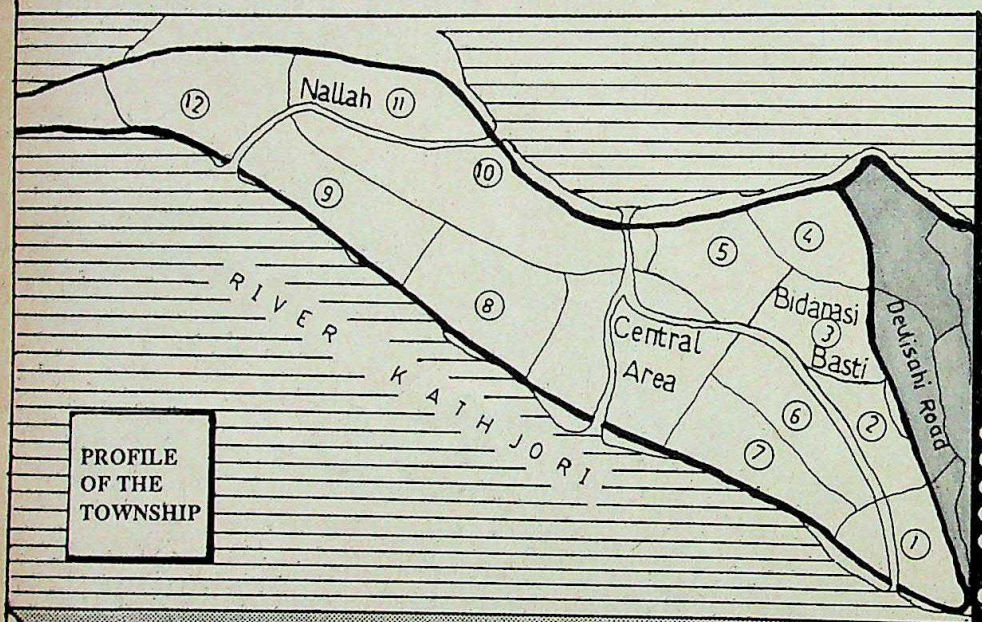

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Kanta—that Devi Lal's opponents are citing as the motive for the alleged murder. Another theory is that Supriya committed suicide because of her husband's alleged affairs with various women whom he would bring to the farmhouse. But Matoria categorically says: "My daughter never had any differences with her husband."

Abhay—who looks after Devi Lal's 150-acre farm in Teja Khera—even admitted to INDIA TODAY that he often visited Kanta at her hostel in Hissar, but insisted that Supriya always accompanied him. Said he: "It is amply clear that some people want to settle their political scores with my grandfather." For good measure he added: "No one would have come to know if I had murdered my wife because there are so many safer ways of doing such things."

However, Devi Lal's foes maintain that several discrepancies continue to needle. For example, the doctor who Sampat Singh said had conducted the post mortem, told the press at Sirsa that he had done so at the local hospital in Chautala. But Chautala and Matoria said the post mortem was conducted at the farmhouse. Then, the police spokesman said the body had not been touched till Supriya's parents arrived. But Matoria said he first saw the body lying on the bed, draped in a quilt. Moreover, Matoria says the bullet hole was just below Supriya's left ear, but the post mortem and police report state that the bullet entered from the front of the neck, and emerged from the back.

Most pertinently, police arms experts insist that the .32 was a sophisticated model and it was impossible for it to have gone off on its own, as could happen with country made .12 bore guns or revolvers. Then, how could six persons in a room a bare 10 feet away mistake a gunshot for a bursting cracker?

These questions will probably remain unanswered. What has been proved is that in Indian politics everything is grist to the mill as long as it serves to defame an opponent. And the Opposition bludgeon Devi Lal was, for a change, at the receiving end as a death in his family was politicised for all it was worth by the Congress(I).

—VIPUL MUDGAL

BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Times of Celebration

WE must all be eternally grateful to the Times of India *for restoring the word Sesquicentennial to its rightful place in the English language. Specially considering it was declared extinct some 150 years ago. (Now we know why the* Times *is called the Old Lady of Boribunder). But having been convinced that the newspaper is concerned about existential issues, it is time to peek into the Pandora's box the* Times *may have inadvertently opened.*

Somewhat carried away with its own enthusiasm, The paper now plans to bring out a special ice cream called the 'Times Scoop'. Also on the menu is the temporary take-over of a restaurant for one year which will be renamed 'Times Square'. But what would happen if the other national dailies decided to follow the leader?

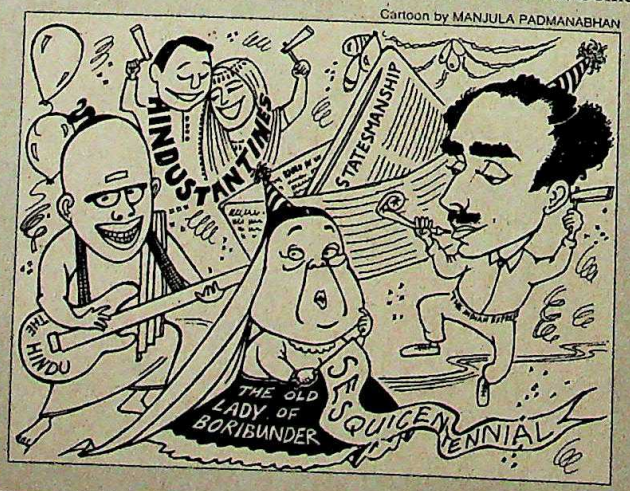
The Hindu decides to celebrate its Consequential Year with a bang. They kick-off the celebrations with a rock concert on Marina Beach featuring the Kickbacks, the popular rock group from Sweden and their lead singer Chitra Subramaniam. Next comes a bumper commemorative issue featuring its unique contribution to newspaper language titled 'Hinduisms'. This is followed by a series of religious discourses at dawn. The grand finale is an elaborate exhibition titled 'The Hindu Backlash', depicting all 200 pages of the Bofors documents they have published and explaining clearly what they all actually add up to.

The Hindustan Times, not to be outdone, celebrates its Inconsequential Year. Their bumper issue is a 200-page feature titled 'The Rajiv Gandhi Interview' done by Editor H.K. Dua. In the interview, Rajiv holds forth on India's efforts to reach the 20th century and for the next 100 pages lists his government's achievements. But the *piece de resistance* is an exclusive affair in Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium where all the 75,000 invitees are couples who met through the paper's matrimonial columns.

The Statesman, in keeping with its image, maintains a relatively low profile while celebrating its Existessential Year. They start the ball rolling with a convention called 'Elder Statesman' honouring the country's freedom fighters (only seven show up, the other two are afraid of flying). This is followed by a massive, year-long advertising campaign with the slogan being 'Statesman-like' explaining why advertising in their paper is cheaper and reaches more readers than the *Times* or the *Hindustan Times*. The celebrations end with prominent government leaders like Lalit Suri and Satish Sharma sailing down the Hooghly in a launch named 'Statesmanship'.

The *Indian Express* stages its own Quit-essential celebrations. Their bumper issue is a 300-page article by Arun Shourie titled "Denials, Denials and More Denials. What else is there Mr Prime Minister?" explaining why Rajiv is corrupt. This is followed by a seminar titled 'Morality in Public Life' featuring leading journalists like Ram Jethmalani, A.G. Noorani, Soli Sorabjee, Chandra Swami, Nusli Wadia and S. Gurumurthy. The finale is a grand party in Ram Nath Goenka's penthouse suite in the Express Towers where the newspaper formally joins the Opposition front which is then renamed the Janata Express.

Cartoon by MANJULA PADMANABHAN



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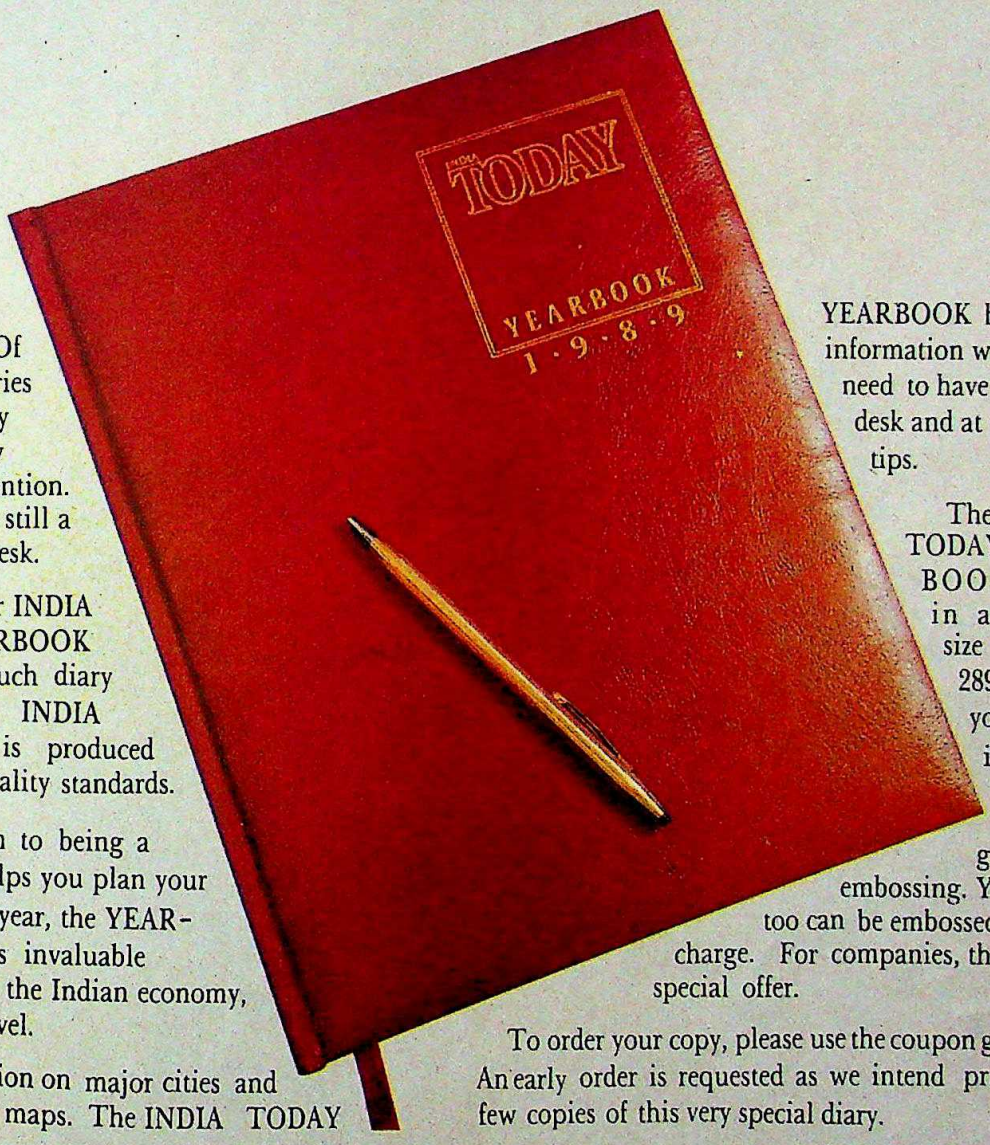

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BENAZIR BHUTTO THE NEW CHALLENGE

BHAWAN SINGH

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FINALLY, she has made her tryst with destiny. Finally, her long and wearying journey has ended. She now stands at the signpost that has guided her like an unwavering beacon for 11 turbulent years—at the threshold of history.

No one will grudge Benazir Bhutto that distinction. No one deserves it more. At 35, the Daughter of the East, as she has named her recent autobiography, Benazir has arrived in the forefront of Pakistan politics with such adroitness it is as if it were pre-ordained.

Considering the fairy-tale embroidery of her life, perhaps it was. But now the fairy-tale is over. Benazir may have come face to face with her destiny. But she has also to come face to face with reality. The mantle of a father is an uncomfortable one for anyone to wear. For Benazir, not just a woman in a male-dominated society but one long driven by the desire to be the first woman prime minister of an Islamic state, it will be even more so.

After the initial enthusiasm on her return in the summer of 1986, even Benazir had tended to slacken, waiting for fate to intervene. The opportunity came when a Pakistan Air Force C-130 hurtled down to the wastes of Bahawalpur, taking with it General Zia-ul-Haq. Once that happened she was quickly making all the right moves. Within a short time, as politicians more experienced and older than her scratched about to work out new alliances and strategies, she had hit the campaign trail, emerging with a remarkable independence of image and thought. In the process, she has proved that behind that frail exterior is a woman whose time has come. She has also displayed the two qualities that mark leaders above others—charisma and courage.

SHE HAS PROVED BEHIND THAT FRAIL EXTERIOR IS A LEADER WHOSE TIME HAS COME, DISPLAYING TWO VERY ESSENTIAL QUALITIES— CHARISMA AND COURAGE.

But the challenge ahead is even more daunting. Zia's death may have catapulted her to dizzying heights of glory. But Zia's legacy could as inexorably drag her down. She must provide leadership and direction in a society ravaged by an officially-sponsored culture of crime and cor-

Karachi crowd: Benazir's enclave

M. RAHMAN

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ruption. Guns, goons, and God combine to make a formidable adversary at the best of times. But with the nation at the brink of a financial crisis, and people's long-suppressed aspirations springing out like so many genies from a bottle, Benazir and her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) face a rough road ahead.

Ethnic strife, secessionist pulls, heroin-smuggling, gun-running and the depredations of a cynically conceived Islamisation drive have vitally damaged the national fabric. Ethnic massacres have turned Karachi into a city under siege. Sindhis, Mohajirs, Baluchis and now the Seraikis of southern Punjab demand either separation or greater autonomy from the Punjabi-dominated state. Pakistan today has two million drug addicts, and a thriving trade in heroin which has tainted the name of even prominent families. And gun-running has contributed a new expression to the language—Kalashnikov culture. Zia may have gone but the chaos and corruption he has left behind could ultimately prove to be his revenge against his successor.

Benazir will now have to deal with a society which tragically repudiated its future for a medieval nightmare of bigotry and violence. But the unprecedented spectacle in Karachi after the poll held out some hope. For several days, the streets were taken over at dusk by thousands of exuberant young people heralding a new beginning.

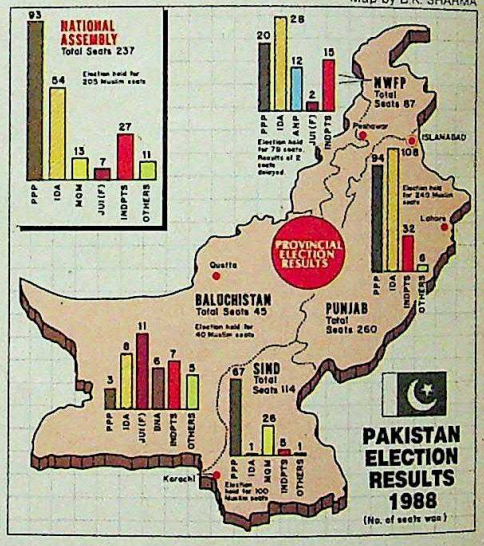
Waving party flags, dancing, singing, young men—even a few women—jammed the streets till dawn in their Toyotas and Suzukis. It was a spontaneous upsurge, a requiem to 11 years of Islamisation and authoritarian rule, a samba to a new spirit of freedom in a city once controlled by the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami.

Karachi was celebrating the success of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), an infant organisation representing people whose families migrated from India. In a few enclaves, especially around Benazir's new bungalow in the upper-class Clifton area and her working class Lyari constituency, the streets were also crowded by PPP supporters. As they danced outside her new three-storey residence, named after her two-month-old son Bilawal, Benazir conferred with her advisors, and exuded the calm and confidence befitting a victor.

BENAZIR AND HER MOTHER NUSRAT BHUTTO WERE PAINTED AS ANTI-PUNJAB AND PRO-INDIA. THE MAIN APPEAL IN THE RULING IDA'S CAMPAIGN WAS TO JINGOISM AND PROVINCIAL CHAUVINISM.

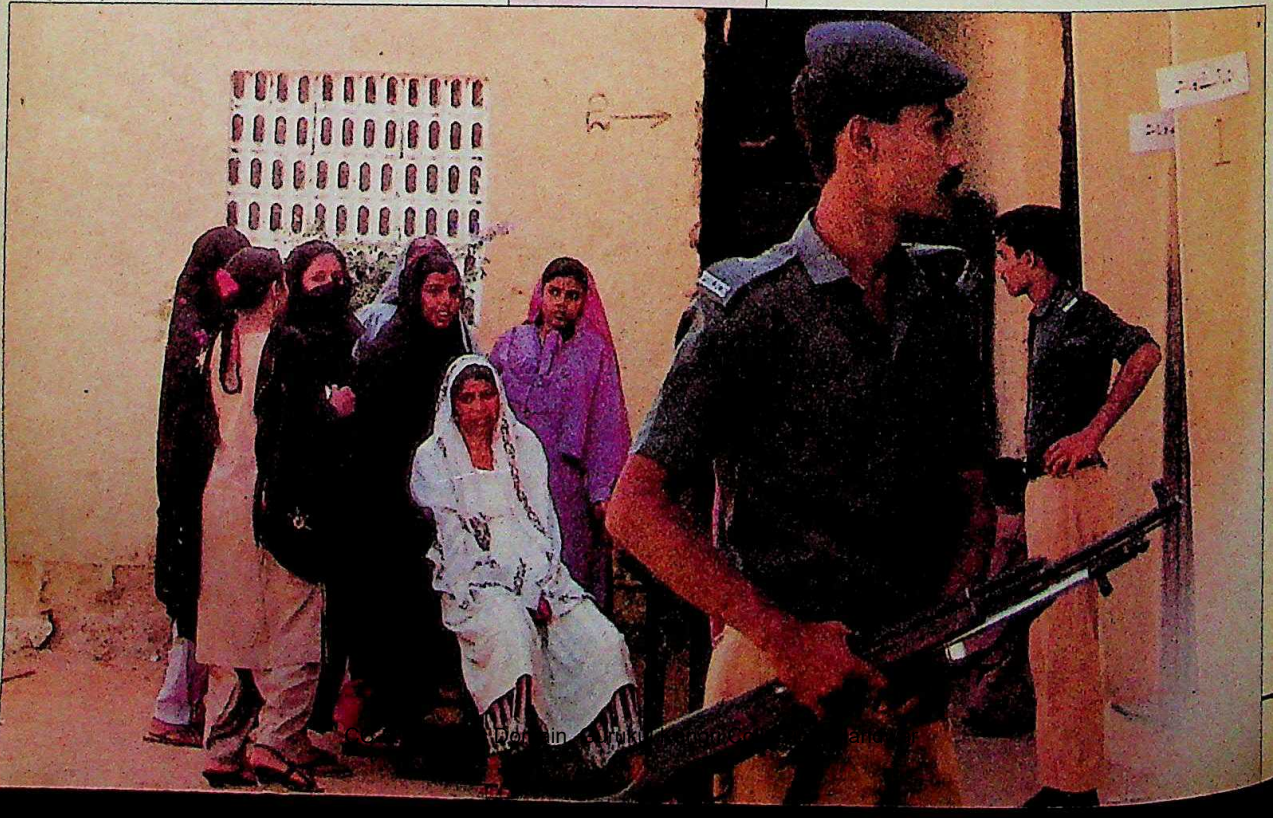
No matter how long President Ishaq Khan dilly-dallied, he was left with no alternative. Benazir's PPP not only had the most number of seats in the National Assembly, it was also the only party to win from all four provinces. And along with the MQM, it swept Sind, where the

Map by B.K. SHARMA



Photographs by BHAWAN SINGH

Women at a polling booth: low turnout



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resentment against Punjabi domination runs high. Denying Benazir the right to form a government was tantamount to inviting another break-up of Pakistan.

The scenes outside her house were enough evidence that the times had changed, that the rulers of Pakistan will now have to recognise a new reality. Incredibly, the *joie de vivre* was so pervasive that the festivities went on through the night without any violence or street confrontations. It really looked like the nation was finally emerging from a bloody and repressive period. "The real drama of the change that has taken place was enacted on the stage of Karachi. It was a spectacle of cultural liberation," noted Ghazi Salahuddin, assistant editor of Karachi daily *Dawn*.

BUT the mood up north in Lahore, capital of Pakistan's most politically significant province, was sombre. In Punjab, the contest between the PPP and the ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) had been intense and vicious. The province's Muslim League Chief Minister, 42-year-old Nawaz Sharif, and his Jamaat allies masterminded a campaign in the last week of electioneering which painted the PPP as a traitorous Sindhi party led by two vengeful, immoral women. An old photograph of Begum Nusrat Bhutto dancing with former US President Gerald Ford was also reproduced on thousands of handbills and posters to shock the Muslim voter.

The main appeal in the IDA campaign, however, was to jingoism and provincial chauvinism. Benazir and her mother were charged with being anti-Punjab and pro-India. The PPP was attacked as an agent of an incredible international conspiracy hatched by American Jews, Moscow and New Delhi.

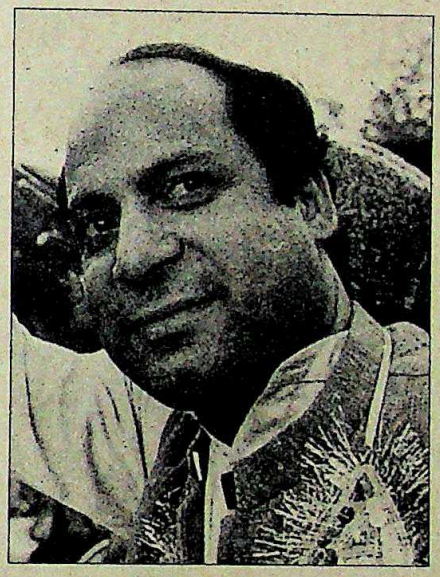
Benazir's attempt to reassure the ruling elite by giving tickets to former Zia supporters, the lack of a cohesive party organisation, and the alienation of many old party workers all affected the PPP's ability to counteract the IDA propaganda in Punjab. And finally, many committed but poor PPP supporters were disenfranchised by the requirement of producing national identity cards at polling booths. The new rule resulted in an orderly poll (and possibly prevented large-scale rigging by the IDA), but the low turnout—40 per cent against around 60 per cent in the 1970 elections—crucially slashed the PPP vote in many constituencies.

Even so, in Punjab, the PPP came out ahead of the IDA in the National Assembly poll, winning 53 seats against its rival's 44. But its landslide victory in Sind, where it completely routed the IDA, curiously confirmed the propaganda in Punjab that the PPP was a Sindhi party, reducing its support in the provincial poll three days later.

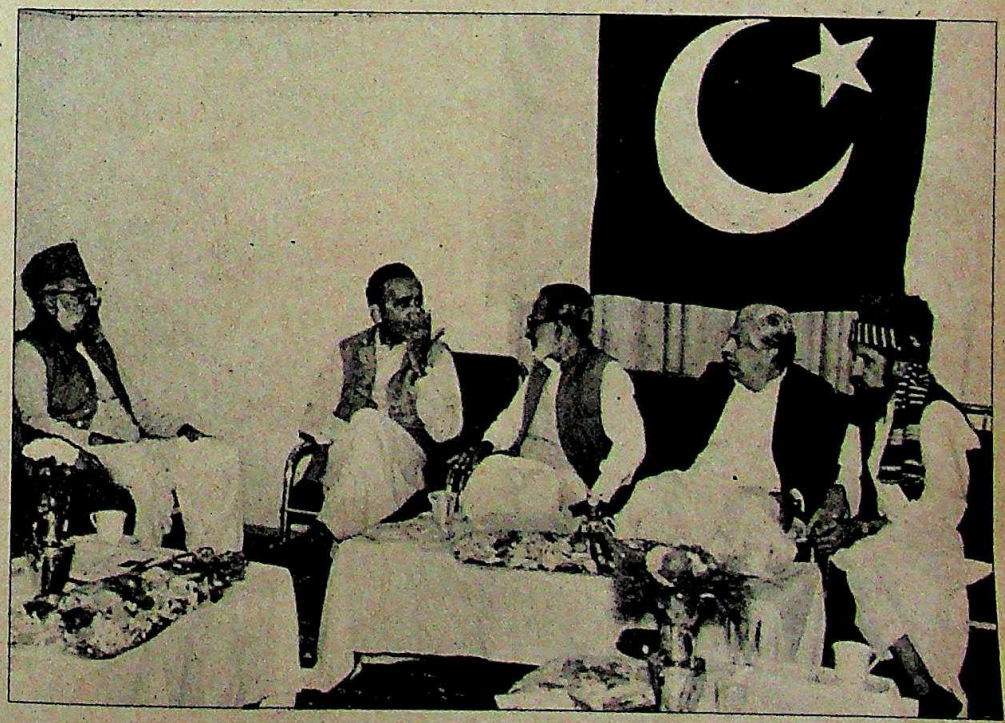
Nevertheless, the election results on the whole demonstrated that Pakistanis had voted intelligently and sensibly. In rural Sind, the vote was overwhelmingly against regional, anti-federation leaders and parties like Mumtaz Bhutto, Rasool Bux Palejo and the Sind National Alliance. Politicians who had either collaborated with Zia, or caved in during the final years, like IDA chief Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, former prime minister Mohammed Khan Junejo or his spiritual mentor the Pir of Pagara, were totally humiliated, along with the province's chief minister and several provincial and federal ministers.

In Karachi and Hyderabad, the two main cities in the province, MQM leaders were rewarded for several years of dedicated political activity. In Punjab, politicians who had changed sides at the last minute like former minister of state for defence Rana Naeem Mehmood or those who had failed to nurture their constituency, like General Tikka Khan, secretary-general of the PPP, were trounced. In the most sensational rejection of the Zia legacy, the chief minister of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Lt-General Fazle Haq, whose name has been linked with the heroin trade, was defeated in all four provincial constituencies that he contested, and won his National Assembly seat after polling a ridiculous 5,500 votes. And in the ultimate irony, after years of Islamisation, just five candidates from the Jamaat were elected to the 237-member National Assembly.

The PPP, with 93 seats against the IDA's 54, was the only party in a position to form a government. Thus, Ishaq Khan's delay in inviting Benazir to form the federal government, was totally unwarranted.



Nawaz Sharif (left); and IDA leaders in Lahore: desperate bid



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But the reason for keeping the PPP leader waiting lay elsewhere. Islamabad was clearly lost to the ruling IDA but there was hope in Punjab. Since the IDA had won 108 seats against the PPP's 94 in the provincial assembly, Sharif could hope to retain power with the support of independents. As Benazir declared in Islamabad after her meeting with Ishaq: "The entire game being played is aimed at saving the chief ministership of one province. Giving a long rope to such elements is to give more time for using official money and machinery to try to undermine the verdict of the people."

But with Benazir as prime minister, the scales will definitely tilt in favour of the PPP in Punjab. Many independents and IDA rebels will be tempted to support the PPP. As it is, a group of nearly 30 IDA legislators hailing from feudal families and opposed to the leadership of the newly-rich industrialist Sharif, were itching to pull the rug from under the chief minister's feet. The PPP was intent on Punjab. As a Benazir advisor said: "You cannot rule Pakistan without controlling Punjab."

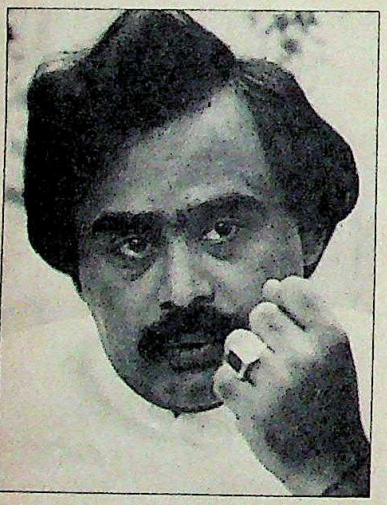
There were other compelling reasons for the delay in Benazir's appointment. Bhutto's young and impetuous daughter was making a bid for power as the head of a party whose founder was ousted from power in an army coup and later hanged, while thousands of party workers were jailed and tortured under martial law. General Mirza Aslam Beg, who succeeded Zia as the army chief, is known to be keen on keeping the army out of politics. Yet the return of the PPP to power cannot but arouse fears of retaliation against the armed forces for the unjust hanging of Bhutto. Benazir refused to give details about her late night, three-hour-long meeting with Beg beyond saying simply that they "discussed the political situation". But she added: "I am aware there are certain elements who are telling the army that the PPP, if it comes to power, will resort to promotions, demotions, revenge and interference. This isn't true. We want a professional army. We don't want a political army."

Nonetheless, there is a significant section within the armed forces which believes that Pakistan can remain united only if soldiers continue to play an active role outside the barracks. This group's political aspirations are best exemplified by the working of Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) which closely monitors and manipulates domestic politics, besides conducting Pakistan's secret Afghan war. The ISI, now headed by Major-General Hameed Gul, virtually functions as a government within a government, with its political wing reportedly manned by thousands of people.

A popularly elected PPP government could try and restrict the army's present role, especially on issues like Pakistan's nuclear policy, Afghanistan and the gargantuan defence budget. And Beg appeared to be expressing anxieties about the PPP within the army when he gave a call to politicians after the results were out to "forge a consensus and lay the foundation of a broad-based popular government". A PPP-IDA coalition government was clearly an incredible idea, but the PPP was prevailed upon to accept Ishaq Khan as the President for a fresh term, with the seasoned, 73-year-old former bureaucrat seen as a countervailing presence to the inexperienced Benazir.

THE army is also seeking a permanent role in government at the highest echelons through a device like the Emergency Defence Council, constituted after Zia's sudden death as a policy reviewing body. All the three service chiefs sit on the council, along with the top civilian executive.

But the best guarantee for the army that the PPP will not abandon its new-found moderate politics comes from the party's lack of an absolute majority in the National Assembly. Benazir will have to form a government with the support of independent and smaller parties like the MQM and Maulana Fazlur Rahman's Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F). Smaller political groups, however, can always be influenced by the army to withdraw support to the PPP.



MQM's Hussain and JUI(F)'s Rahman: sharing power?

The protracted negotiations with both the MQM and the JUI(F) by the PPP provided ample evidence of the need for Benazir to evolve a politics of consensus in order to survive as prime minister. Created in 1983 out of a university students' organisation, the MQM is led by 36-year-old Altaf Hussain and has been at the forefront of the ethnic conflict between Urdu-speaking Mohajirs and Pathans and, more recently, Sindhis. The MQM's demands include recognition of Mohajirs as Pakistan's fifth 'nationality' and repatriation of Bihari Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh, both unacceptable to the other ethnic groups. But even if the MQM moderates its more extreme demands, it will push for greater benefits for Mohajirs even as it agrees to participate in the governments at Islamabad and Karachi.

Both the MQM and the JUI(F) are demanding two cabinet posts. The MQM wants an economic ministry to ensure a share of the cake for Mohajirs, while Benazir has offered the ministry of religious affairs to 42-year-old Rahman. The JUI(F), however, has been adopting contradictory public postures vis-a-vis the PPP—it first

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categorically declared that a woman would be unacceptable as prime minister, but later Rahman backed the PPP's case by maintaining that the party with the largest number of seats should form the government.

The JUI(F)'s confusing stand reflects the pressures being put on religious parties and leaders by orthodox Islamic regimes like Saudi Arabia to ensure that Benazir does not become the first woman prime minister in the Islamic world. The Saudis are anxious about the impact of Benazir's example on women in Islamic society. But against Saudi pressure is ranged the JUI(F) leaders' political ambitions.

Even more important will be the attitude of the US. The Americans have already received a shock in Pakistan—US officials reacted strongly against General Beg's recent proposal for a "strategic consensus" between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey to safeguard the country's eastern border. The proposal is directed against India, but it will seriously compromise US policy in the region and drastically reduce the superpower's influence in Pakistan. Beg's proposal also reflects the thinking of the "professional" wing of the army, uncertain of US support

MANY PPP NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS ARE YOUNG AND EDUCATED, AND UNDERSTAND THE NEED TO LIVE TOGETHER WITH INDIA. THE *JEHAD* SYNDROME IS A THING OF THE PAST.

The PPP in power will also certainly result in a review of Pakistan's relations with India. In spite of a strident anti-India campaign by the IDA, Benazir was considerably restrained. She frequently emphasised before the elections that the PPP's policy towards India would be based on the Simla accord. As prime minister she is likely to try for a genuine understanding with India. Says a Benazir advisor: "Most of the PPP members of the National Assembly are young and educated, and understand the need to live together with India. We are free of the *jehad* syndrome." For the first time on both sides of the border, the post-Partition generation will determine the fate of the two nations. In fact, Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto have more in common than their youth. Both were educated abroad, are distinctly western in their outlook and survived the trauma of losing a favourite parent to the kind of political violence that has held the subcontinent's destiny hostage for four decades.

"What is required now is a gesture from India to reduce the perception of threat in Pakistan, and this is best done on the trade front," says Pakistan's former finance minister Mubashir Hasan. "Our country is faced with considerable

Benazir with Ishaq Khan: pressure for consensus

Soldiers in Punjab: new directions

In the event of a conflict with India.

But while the US can hope to use its influence within the army to safeguard any future threat to its strategic interests, its options on the political plane are now fairly restricted. Once having exerted pressure for holding elections in Pakistan, it cannot now alienate the victor by opposing the formation of a popular government. Moreover, ever since her return to Pakistan in 1986, Benazir has followed a consciously pro-US policy—the left wing within the PPP was sidelined, and anti-American slogans banned. "The US will first explore the possibility of working with Benazir. Where is the alternative?" said a former federal minister in Islamabad. Soon after she arrived in the capital, Benazir had two meetings with the new US Ambassador, Robert Oakley, who observed earlier that America was not opposed to the transfer of power to any political party as long as Pakistan's economic policies remained unchanged.

foreign exchange pressure, so the introduction of rupee trade between the two neighbours would greatly benefit Pakistan." With the country now faced with an economic crisis, PPP leaders see other areas of cooperation. "We can sell gas and furnace oil to India, and both countries can launch joint efforts abroad in shipping, insurance and banking," says Tariq Rahim, a Benazir advisor tipped for a federal ministership.

However, a turnaround in Pakistan's policy towards India is likely to be gradual, with Benazir first trying to remove misgivings created among people about her own position by the IDA propaganda. "A more liberal regime in Islamabad will certainly mean better relations with India, but it would be unrealistic to expect dramatic changes overnight," cautions a diplomatic observer. "Initially, the changes are likely to be modest—an increase in cultural exchange, the opening of the Khokrapar border checkpost in Sind." If Rajiv visits Islamabad

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for the SAARC meeting scheduled for December, it may provide the two leaders the first opportunity to begin a dialogue for normalising relations.

The elections signal other far-reaching changes. Benazir is not the only young leader who will occupy the front benches in the National Assembly. Several other members who are certain to play an important role in Pakistani politics are in their 30s and early 40s. This time the voters have rejected many of the senior politicians who dominated national politics in the past.

In their place is a young leadership at the helm in all the four main political groupings—the PPP, the IDA, the MQM and the JUI(F). Benazir's cabinet is also likely to have the lowest average age ever on the subcontinent. Many of the PPP leaders tipped for ministership are young—lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan, former bureaucrats Tariq Rahim and Farooq Leghari, Punjab leaders Fazal Saleh Hayat, Yusuf Reza Gilani and Jehangir Badr. But even as the exercise was on to put together the first PPP cabinet after Bhutto's downfall, the search was on for a prospective finance minister—the only candidate, Cambridge-educated landlord Sardar Asif Ali, failed to win his seat from Punjab. Benazir herself is expected to retain the foreign ministry, where she worked briefly in the '70s when her father was prime minister.

A young team of bureaucrats and economic advisors is also expected to come into prominence in Islamabad—besides former associates of Rahim and Leghari, the names being mentioned are Planning Commission official Meekal Aziz Ahmed, son of the former foreign secretary, his brother Adnan, and cabinet joint secretary Khalid Cheema, a brother-in-law of Ahsan.

Youthfulness is a characteristic which Benazir's parliamentary party shares with the group around her father when he first came to power in 1971. But the early leftist ideology of the PPP is significantly missing now. In fact, the assembly as a whole will

BENAZIR BHUTTO

Woman of Substance

HER eyes are the windows to her soul—and her spirit. Expressive and eloquent, one minute they flash fire and the next turn demure and downcast. That is also, perhaps, an equally eloquent expression of the evolution of Benazir Bhutto, from a glamorous, westernised and somewhat high-strung socialite to a woman who would be queen.

Some are born to greatness. Some achieve it. Others have it thrust upon them. With Benazir, the three have been so inextricably intertwined as to transform her personality into a paranthesis of paradoxes. The greatness lies in the fact that she has been able to transcend her past—and her prejudices—and emerge as eminently suitable for a position that would have been unthinkable a few months ago.

The secret lies perhaps in her strong sense of history and her part in its making which has so long been denied to her. For Benazir, the ascension to power in Pakistan is as much an expression of personal faith as it is a belief in her own destiny.

More remarkably, Benazir has achieved what is perhaps her greatest triumph. She has rendered her past irrelevant. Till now, Benazir's biggest handicap has been, ironically enough, the fortuitousness of her birth. Born into affluence and the privileges of power, her early life—an exclusive convent, Radcliffe and then Oxford—was far removed from the bruising battleground of Pakistan politics. She may have been a daughter of the east but her initial orientation and psychological upbringing were predominantly western.

Even so, she had a certain mystique and independence of spirit that marked her as someone special. It was precisely that which prompted Bhutto to anoint her as his political heir rather than her two brothers or her mother, Nusrat.

Thus, well before fate—in the form of General Zia who ordered her father's execution in 1977—intervened to reorder her life and ambitions, Benazir was slowly and inexorably being drawn into the vortex of her destiny—as a future claimant to the throne of Islamabad. At first, it seemed a very distant horizon. Benazir appeared to have inherited the most prominent characteristics of her father—imperiousness and arrogance. That coupled with a certain political immaturity dimmed the lustre, and appeared to reduce her chances of ever coming to power in Pakistan.

It may be the ultimate irony, but the man who perhaps did the most to restore her credibility and her resoluteness of purpose was Zia himself. For seven years after her father's death, Benazir was put through a baptism of fire. Detention, solitary confinement, house arrest and exile, the shackles on her life were intended to break her spirit and deface her image. Instead, it had the opposite effect. She emerged charged with a new energy, the halo of a martyr and the look of a leader.

The fire had tempered her, like steel, into a deadly and sharp-edged weapon. The Benazir who returned riding in triumph through the streets of Lahore in April 1986 was a different person from the vengeful young woman who had chosen exile over humiliation.

The impetus for that came from the hysterical crowds who celebrated her return. Not even Zulfikar Bhutto, at the height of his popularity, had commanded such a massive turnout. But the hysteria also prompted over-confidence. "I can topple the Government any time I want," she announced then. It did not take long for Benazir to realise that she had the support of the crowds but they were not ready to take to the streets and stage a showdown with the army for her. For that, she needed to prove that she would be able to work within the complexities of the system, not outside of it.

This was when the real flowering of Benazir occurred. Her arranged marriage to a wealthy landowner was as much an expression of her commitment to her country as it was a symbol of snapping her ties with her past. As she says in her autobiography: "An arranged marriage was the price in personal choice I had to pay for the political path my life had taken." After Zia's death, her pronouncements reflected the new maturity she had discovered in herself. She realised that the army had to be won over and carefully tailored her statements to reassure them that their exclusive status in Pakistan would remain intact, if more apolitical. More crucial, she made it clear that Pakistan's special relationship with the United States would not be disturbed.

On another level, she set about restructuring the Pakistan People's Party into the kind of political force she wanted behind

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have only a handful of leftists. And only one ardent communist, Sobho Gyanchandani, elected on a Hindu minority ticket from Sind. "I'm going to feel very lonely in this National Assembly," observes Gyanchandani wryly.

The new government's policies will no doubt be influenced by the ideological colouring of the Assembly. With Benazir as prime minister, the PPP will be pro-business, making special efforts to attract investment from abroad both by multinationals and by Pakistani expatriates (according to Rahim, Pakistanis have $ 40 billion invested abroad). It is also unlikely to display any great hurry in implementing land reforms.

A PPP government will certainly restore women's rights taken away by Zia. But where basic changes require a restoration of the 1973 constitution, the PPP will be hamstrung by the lack of a two-thirds majority. Thus many PPP leaders believe that Benazir will be forced to call a mid-term poll by end-1990.

Around Benazir today there is a new excitement and a heightened anticipation as her close associates prepare to take over the reins of government. Much will depend now on the qualities of leadership she displays. Much will also depend on how far the Pakistan Army will support her government in the initial, difficult years. But no matter what the outcome, Bhutto's daughter has already assured for herself a permanent place in history.

—M. RAHMAN in Pakistan

SHE HAD A CERTAIN MYSTIQUE AND INDEPENDENCE OF SPIRIT THAT MARKED HER AS SOMEONE SPECIAL. THIS PROMPTED BHUTTO TO ANOINT HER AS HIS POLITICAL HEIR, RATHER THAN HER TWO BROTHERS OR HER MOTHER.

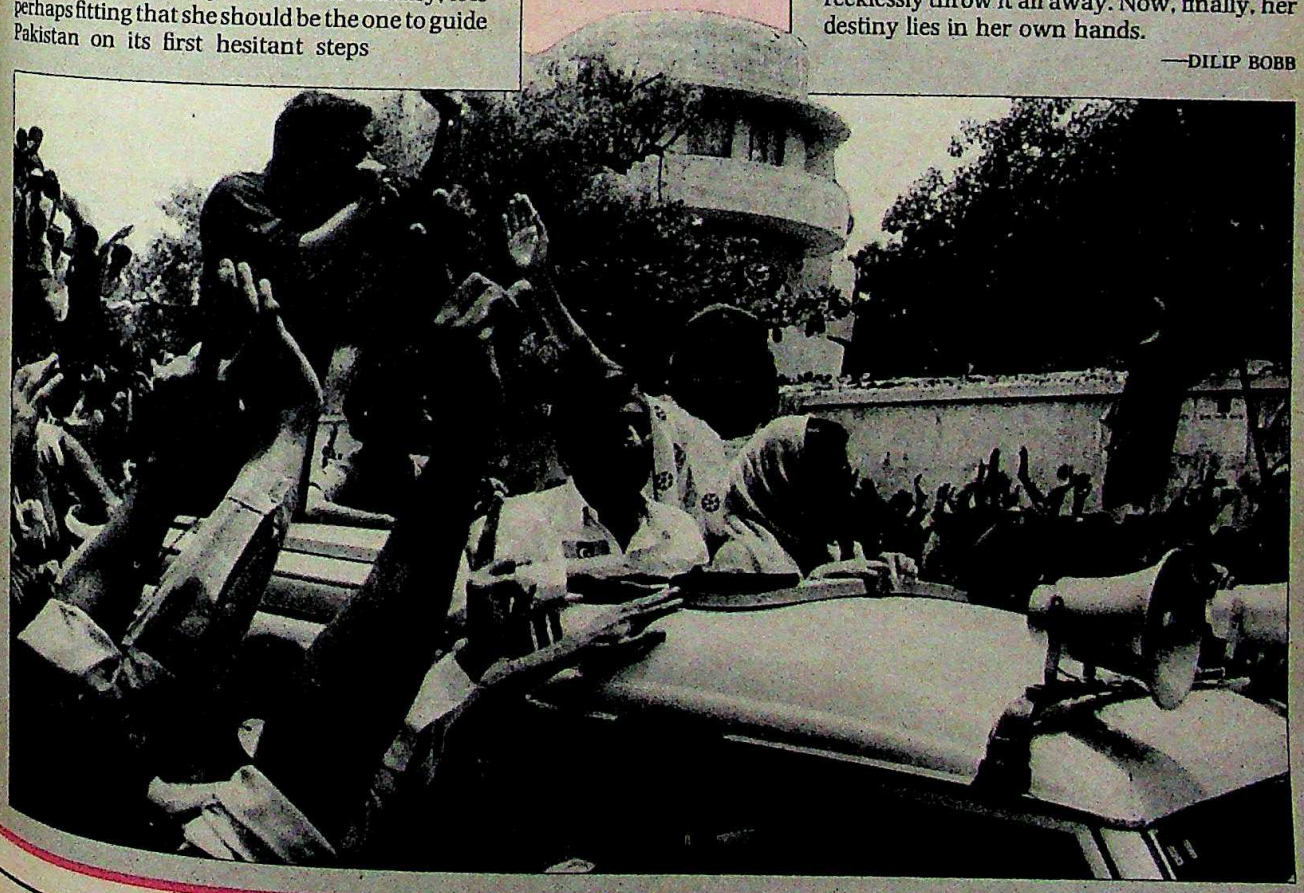
her; people who belonged to her father's generation were replaced by a new generation of leaders, more attuned to her own views and philosophy.

But it was during her election campaign that Benazir excelled herself. A mesmerising orator, she was nonetheless moderate and restrained. In the weeks of emotion-charged campaigning, she skilfully resisted the urge to dance on Zia's grave—not once did she criticise him personally, merely his regime. In Pakistan's conservative society, it was a gesture that bestowed her with an added aura of maturity.

Now, as she stands poised to become the youngest leader of any democratic country, it is perhaps fitting that she should be the one to guide Pakistan on its first hesitant steps towards a new era of hope and transition. She has no experience of governance. But in the last few weeks, she has succeeded in firing the imagination of not only the people of Pakistan but the rest of the watching world. In the last few weeks she has also shown that she has the qualities and the political skill and flexibility to become an effective and democratic leader.

The optimism may be short-lived. Benazir may turn out to be another Cory Aquino or, to use a closer parallel, another Rajiv Gandhi. But she has sacrificed too much and fought too hard for her rightful place in history to recklessly throw it all away. Now, finally, her destiny lies in her own hands.

—DILIP BOBB



Benazir outside her Karachi house in 1986: new maturity

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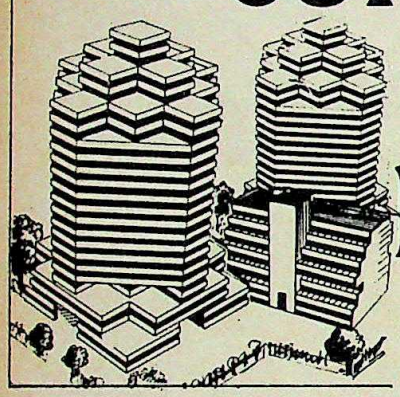

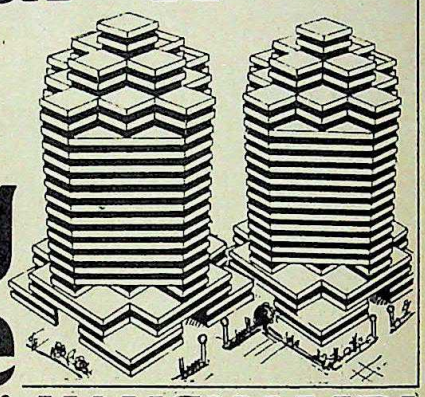

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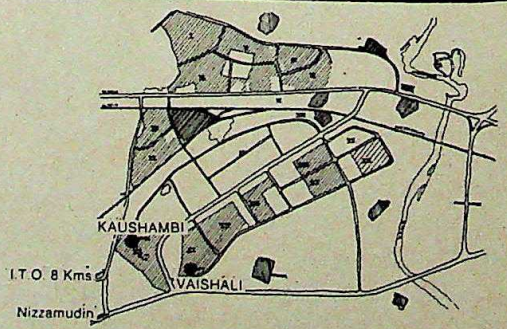

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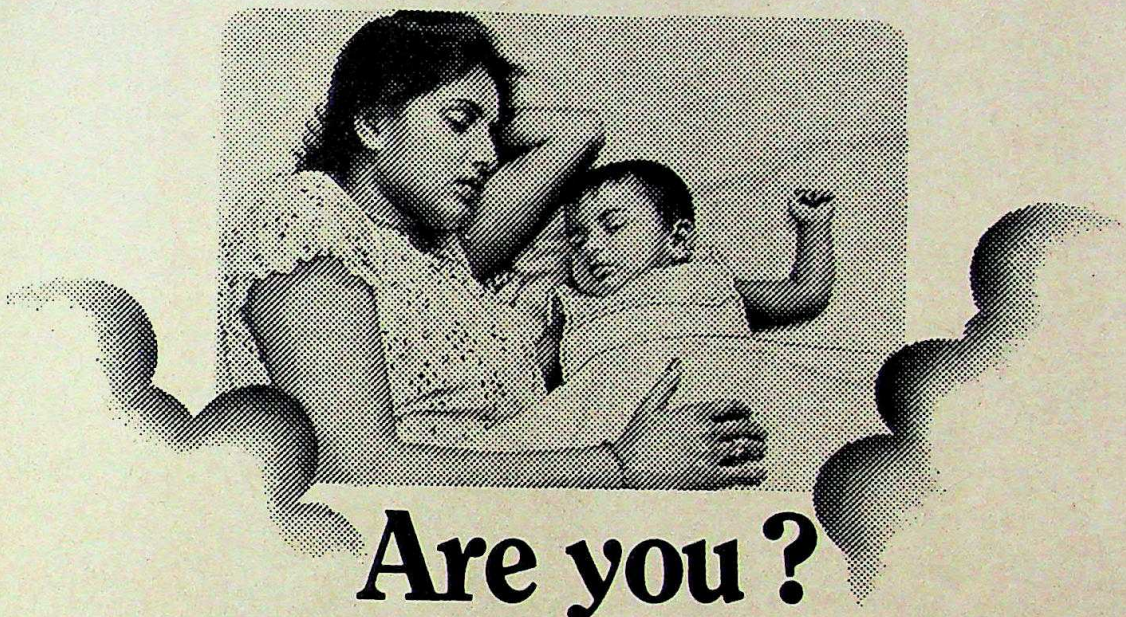

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SRI LANKA

A Vote for Peace

Trouble-free elections to the north-eastern provincial assembly

UNTIL a few weeks ago, it seemed unimaginable—even in senior government circles in South Block—that a Tamil chief minister would soon control a third of Sri Lanka. Even as Defence Minister K.C. Pant repeated public assurances that a successful poll would be conducted in the island's north-east region as stipulated in the Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord, he did so with fingers crossed. But if the political process that began last fortnight with elections to the 71-member North-East Provincial Assembly is completed according to plan, a state cabinet headed by a person belonging to a Tamil militant organisation will become a reality by December 5.

The seeds for an independent government for the northern and the eastern provinces were sown last month with the conclusion of the elections for the 35 assembly seats in the three eastern districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Amparai. In the fray were 119 candidates belonging to the three main parties, the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress (SLMC) and the United National Party (UNP). The EPRLF and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF) combine won 15 seats, thus establishing an unassailable majority of 51 members in the assembly, which is soon to be formally constituted. The popular participation and the elections' success was in total contrast to the first round of polls in October when the combine's 36 candidates were elected unopposed as most others had even failed to file their nominations. As Pant told INDIA TODAY: "We have moved a giant step forward in the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord signed by President Jayewardene and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi."

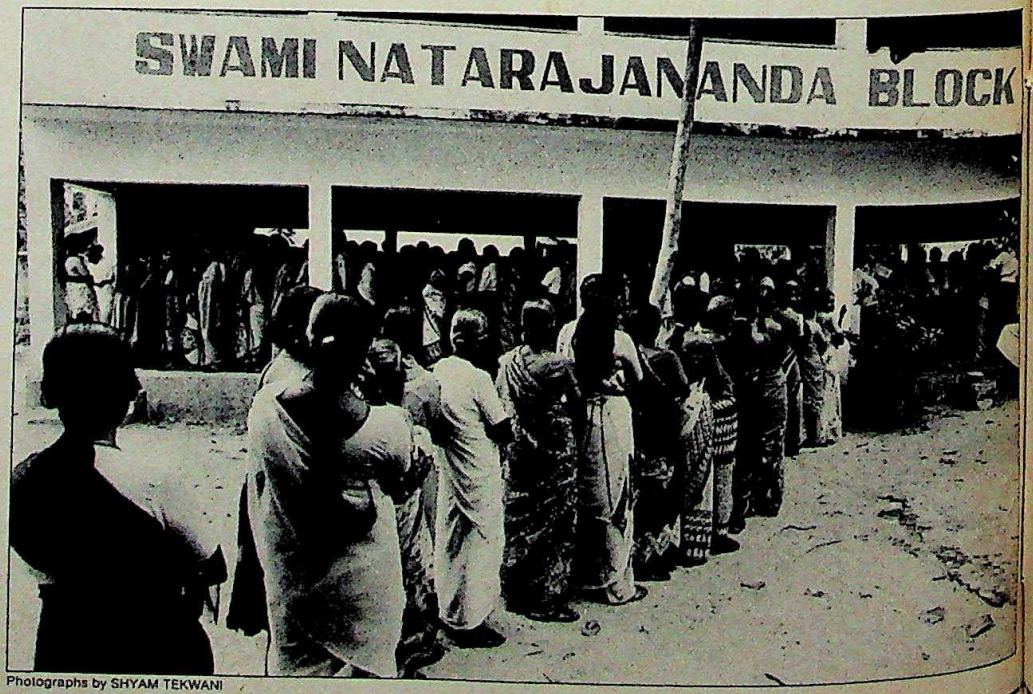
And for once at least in the bloody history of the country the alarmists were proven wrong. For months, all predictions were that of a bloodbath. But not only did the elections pass peacefully, notwithstanding the boycott calls and dire threats issued by the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the dreaded Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP)—temporarily made strange bedfellows in their opposition to the poll—a record 60 per cent of the seven lakh voters turned out. Many of them waited in long queues for at least four to five hours before they got to vote.

Even more ironical, the picturesque Trincomalee remained a stubborn aberration that week—an island of peace when the rest of Sri Lanka was being rocked by waves of bombings, killings and arson perpetrated by the JVP's terror squads. Barring Sinhalas, other voters began arriving at the 576 polling booths from the early hours of morning. In fact, over 30 per cent of the votes were cast within the first three hours.

Making full use of the protection provided by the omnipresent Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), even women turned out in large numbers. Said the principal of a school in Batticaloa: "I will wait till the evening to cast my vote. For the first time we have been given a choice to elect rulers of our choice. This is a good beginning for the Tamils in this region." Thundered a beaming Lt-General Amarjeet Kalkat, chief of the 50,000-strong IPKF in Sri Lanka: "The IPKF has delivered. Democratic forces have been introduced into the system. This is a crushing defeat for those who were opposed to the accord."

The general said what he could only be expected to say. But this time his words had a cutting edge of truth to them. For all the criticism the IPKF has taken—and for all the set-backs it has received over the last 14 months—this time the force could justifiably boast of success. It had provided a violence-free atmosphere for a poll when the overwhelming odds had favoured a bloody set-back.

The provincial elections had become a final test of strength and strategy. The IPKF gameplan to checkmate opponents of the poll was named Operation Mahan Kartavya. A week before the election, the IPKF sealed all the entries to the towns and over 300 villages dotting the eastern parts of the island. Kalkat himself camped in



Queue at polling booth: heavy turnout

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

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Trincomalee's posh Sea Angler's Club directing combing operations from his mobile command post—a three-tonne Shaktiman truck fitted with modern communication equipment.

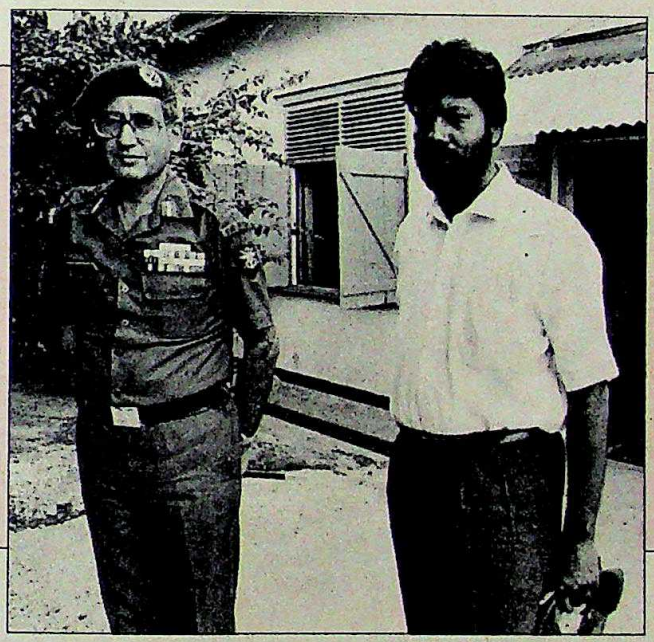
At 4 p.m., election day, Kalkat picked up the hotline and informed his chief, General V.N. Sharma, in New Delhi that Mahan Kartavya had been an unmitigated success. A jubilant Sharma quickly informed Pant, and if there were *laddoos* in South Block that day they would surely have been distributed.

For the Centre it was a political bonanza and the ruling party lost no time in encashing on it. Within 24 hours of the election, Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao told the Lok Sabha: "There is no exuberance in my statement. I am sure this House would like to join me in congratulating the Tamil parties...who have shown tremendous courage and foresight in standing up for peace and democracy."

The Opposition was taken aback at first and then it reacted with, what independent observers agree was, reasonable caution. The DMK and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) warned the Government that, notwithstanding the immediate success story, the continued deployment of the IPKF in Sri Lanka could prove counterproductive. Said P. Upendra, leader of the TDP in Parliament: "We hope this will pave the way for the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka before it is asked to quit." Added the fiery DMK Rajya Sabha member, V. Gopalaswamy: "The Indian Government is trying to install a puppet government in the east. It should talk to the LTTE and not try to kill them. Rao's statement is a cover-up attempt to legitimise an undemocratic and fraudulent election held at gun point."

While the political nature of those who were elected and the complete protection provided by the IPKF to the voters has raised questions about how truly independent the election was of Indian influence, the holding of the poll itself was an important pointer to the fact that rumours of the premature demise of the accord had been somewhat exaggerated. Without the IPKF's determination and the total support from both Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi—the three pillars of the accord—the election could never have been held. The Indian Government was determined to push the provincial elections ahead of Sri Lanka's presidential elections—due in mid-December—in order to pre-empt a new president from delaying the poll or even scrapping it under local pressure, thereby pounding the final nail into the accord's coffin.

Kalkat, who supervised the IPKF's stringent security measures for the polls, can justifiably boast of a success.



Kalkat with Padmanabha: joining hands

Padmanabha, the chief of the EPRLF, makes no bones about the fact that he and his colleagues depend on the IPKF for survival.

In fact, opposition to the poll at this juncture was voiced from a certain section of the Indian bureaucracy as well as the Sri Lankan Government. The Sri Lankans opposed the election as it threatens to formalise the ethnic split in the island and drastically reduce Sri Lankan administrative control over the Tamil-elected provincial government.

And the Indian foreign office had calculated that the elections would unleash bloody encounters between the LTTE and the IPKF. Indeed, the LTTE had vowed not to allow the polls. The Tigers distributed posters all over the province directing its cadres to kill at least five people per village daily from November 12 to November 17. The foreign office took the warning seriously and was against putting its prestige at stake. But Pant and High Commissioner Mani Dixit, who did not go by this assessment, prevailed upon Rajiv. The IPKF was ordered to prepare for the polls and Pant flew down to Madras to discuss details with Kalkat.

The resistance was everywhere. The Sri Lankan bureaucracy and local politicians were against the polls. Even the country's Election Commission expressed its inability to hold the elections on the plea that its staff would feel insecure. Over half a dozen meetings were held in Colombo to sort out this tricky situation. Presided over by Jayewardene, and attended by Defence Secretary General Attigalle, ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake, Dixit and Kalkat, the meetings discussed the security arrangements made by the IPKF. But there was no positive response from the Sri Lankans until the first week of October.

Jayewardene had to even issue written orders to the chief election commissioner for making the necessary arrangements. But local civil servants, under the influence of the JVP, refused to go on election duty. Of the 2,660 polling officials deputed for election duty, only 587 turned up and half of them were flown in on IPKF aircraft. And the IAF lifted 7,000 tonnes of election material to the eastern provinces.

But the long-term political implication of what remains essentially a dramatic military success yet remains incalculable. The elected candidates are known for their sympathies towards the Indian Government. And since the election was held without any campaigning, there are legitimate questions about their

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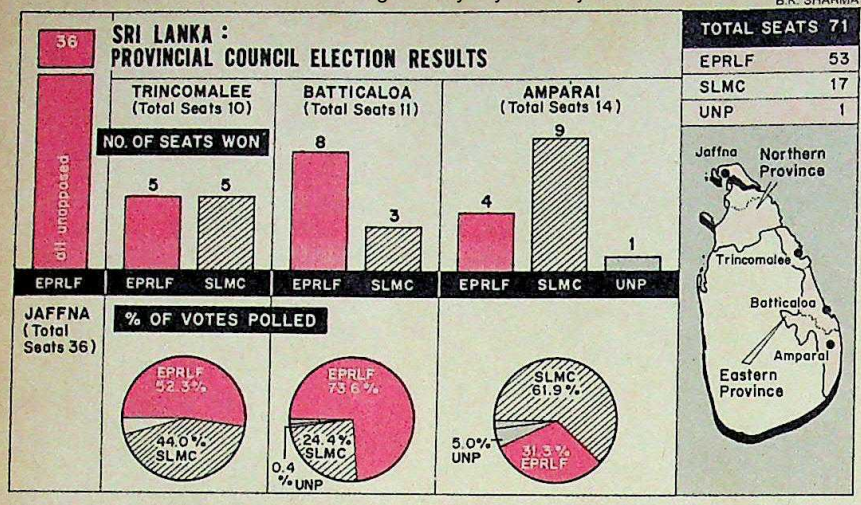

democratic validity. The LTTE has spread the word that candidates were personally chosen by Dixit and General Kalkat, a charge both men stoutly refute.

But the elected candidates make no bones about the fact that they depend on the IPKF for their survival, not only in office but in normal life as well. Admitted K. Padmanabha, chief of the EPRLF: "The IPKF's role is not over with the elections. It has to ensure total peace in the east and the north and get more powers for the provincial government."

The struggle for "more power", as Padmanabha put it, is fraught with the danger of future confrontation between New Delhi and Colombo. Sri Lanka will resist any attempt to give more powers to the Tamil ruled-provincial government, to stem criticism from Sinhala militants. Also, the EPRLF is likely to step up its struggle against Colombo to neutralise the LTTE. The winners have already started to sound confident. Says P. Manoharan, the bearded deputy general secretary of the ENDF: "If the Sri Lankan Government wants peace in this region there will be peace, and if it wants war we will not hesitate in returning to arms."

The problems will only multiply in the process of installing a government. First, Jayewardene could delay appointing a governor. Under the agreement, the governor in Tamil-dominated areas must be a Sinhala. But asserted A. Vardaraj Perumal, an EPRLF leader, who is tipped for chief ministership of the north-east province: "The people have given their mandate in favour of a Tamilian government in the north-est. Any delay in giving us more power will lead to confrontation." Perumal and his colleagues have already prepared a detailed blueprint to extract powers from the Centre.

"The people have given their mandate in favour of a Tamilian government in the north-east. Any delay in giving us power will lead to confrontation."

A. VARDARAJ PERUMAL
chief minister-designate, north-east

However, the EPRLF's main priority is to extract from the Central Government the land management rights and formal merger of the north and the east into one province. Though this must ultimately be decided by a referendum, the Centre is unlikely to concede this demand as it would lead to a Sinhala exodus from the north and the east.

Under the existing arrangements, the provincial government doesn't have any powers to either develop land or build any housing units. In the past, the Centre's land policy was aimed at disturbing the demographic balance in the east by setting up only Sinhala colonies in the Tamil dominated areas. This was the key cause for the breakdown of law and order. And it is precisely this issue that will test the secular and independent stance of the Tamil provincial government.

So the immediate problem for the Eelam leaders and the IPKF still remains the restoration of communal harmony and peace in the region. In this there are communal circles within circles within circles that boggle the imagination. The provincial council elections were fought purely on communal lines with Muslims voting for their own candidates and Tamils electing only Tamilian candidates. In fact, M.H. Asroff, the SLMC leader made it very clear that his party will fight for the creation of a separate council for the Muslim areas.

And with the LTTE still burning bright in the jungles, the success of the elections could be pyrrhic unless efforts are made to rope the LTTE into the new system, thereby paving the way for a phased withdrawal of the IPKF. Realising this, the EPRLF and the Indian Government made conciliatory statements. Said Rao in Parliament: "I once again call upon the LTTE to heed the call of the Tamil people they claim to represent and give up violence." Said T. George, an EPRLF candidate in Trincomalee: "Our enemy is the racist Sri Lankan Government. We want the LTTE to give up the fight against us and join us in fighting the enemy instead."

With the poll over, an unforeseeable future crunch could come at any time. And certainly, it would be a crucial testing time for Indian diplomacy if a hostile government is elected in Colombo. But for the time being the laurels are aplenty: the elections have created a political alternative to the LTTE; the massive turnout, even if biased in one direction, was a vote for peace; it was the first step forward since the signing of the accord; and for the first time the Indian Government had reason to justify the presence of the IPKF in Sri Lanka.

But even in this positive scenario—no matter how temporary—there is a lesson: the Indian Government cannot rest on the laurels of the IPKF, for Sri Lanka continues to be the country's most treacherous foreign policy minefield.

—PRABHU CHAWLA in Trincomalee

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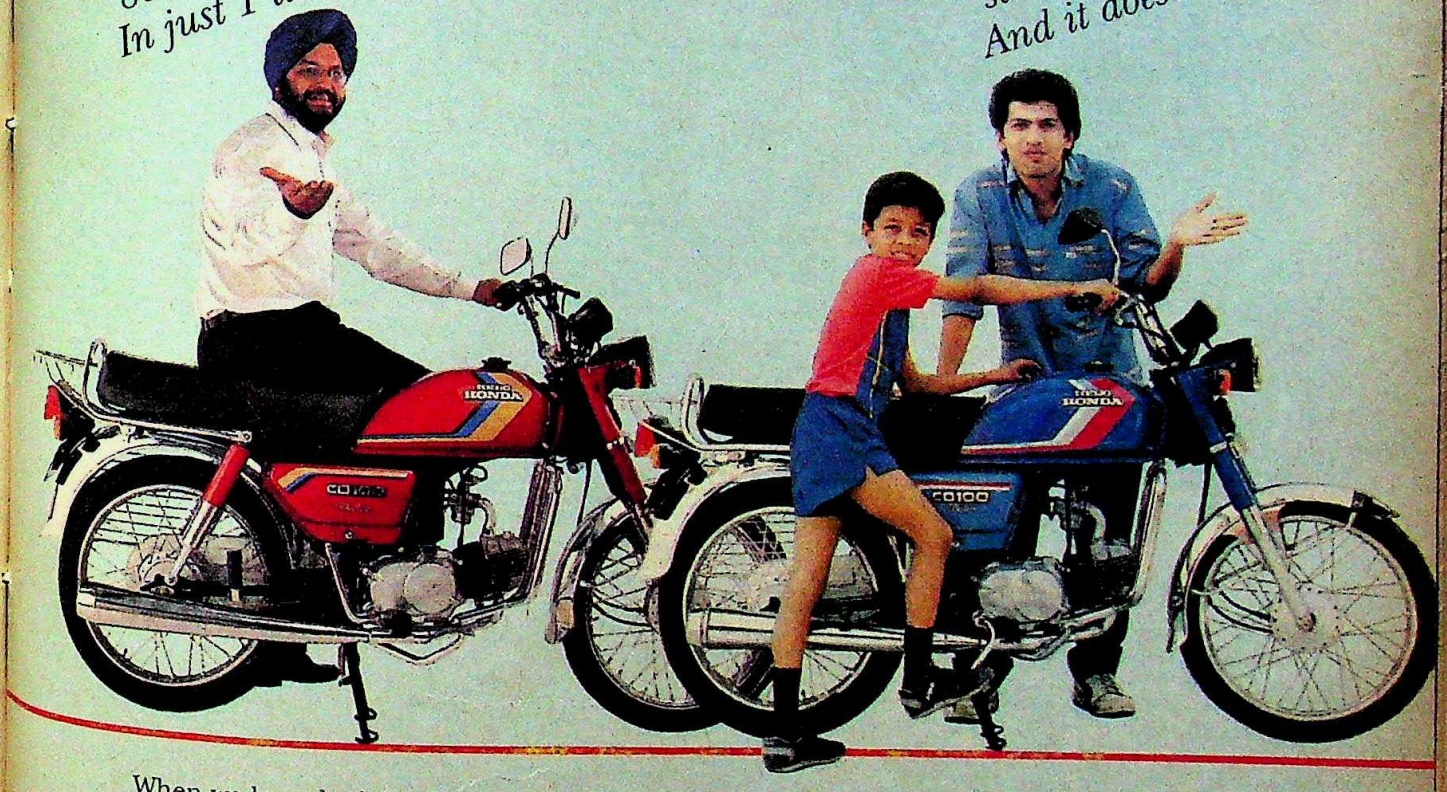

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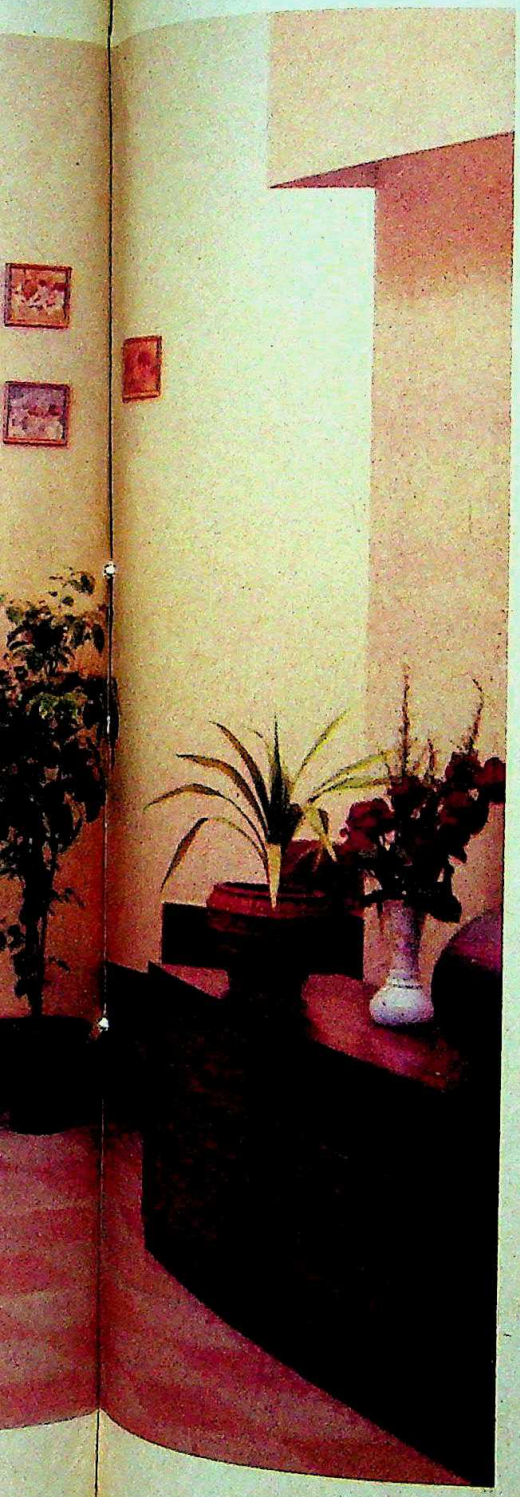

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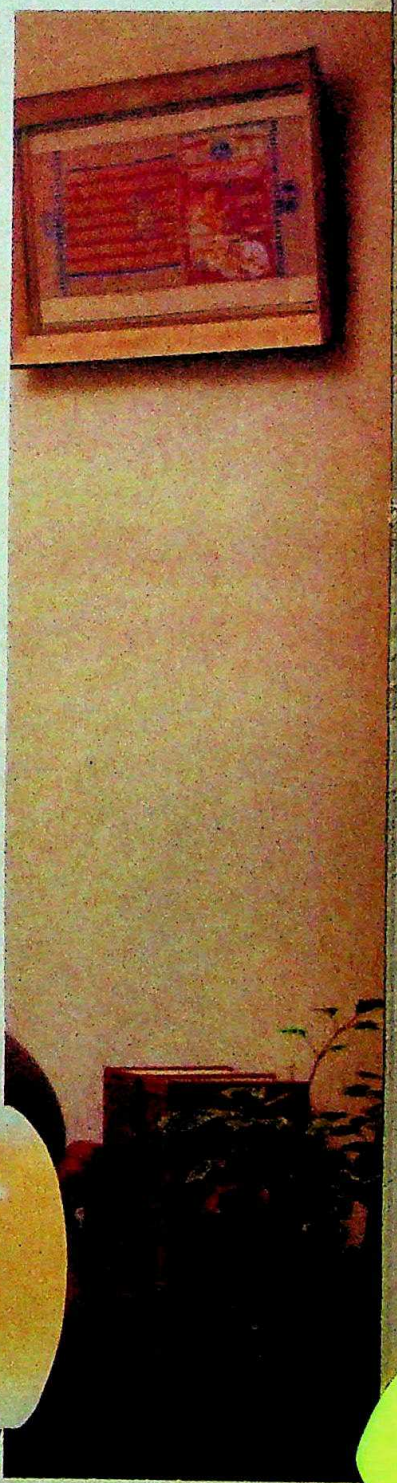

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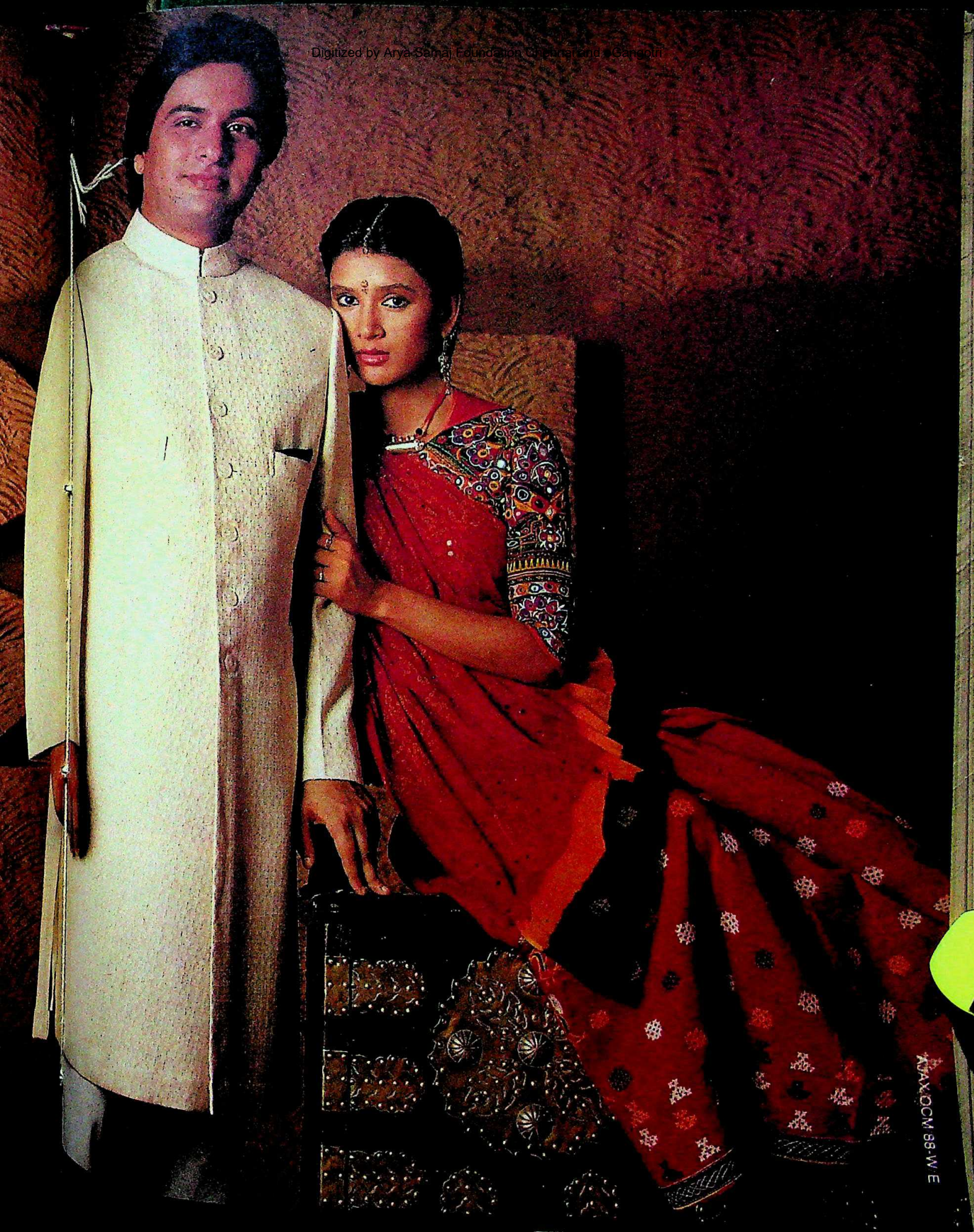

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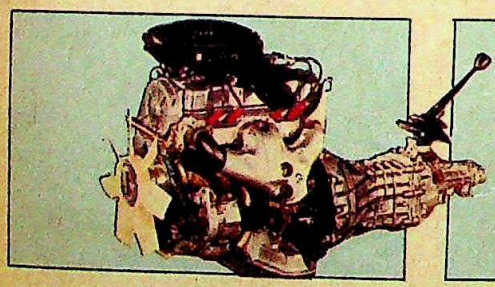

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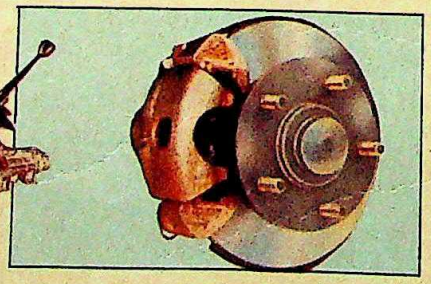

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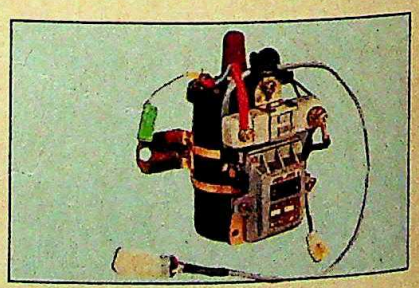

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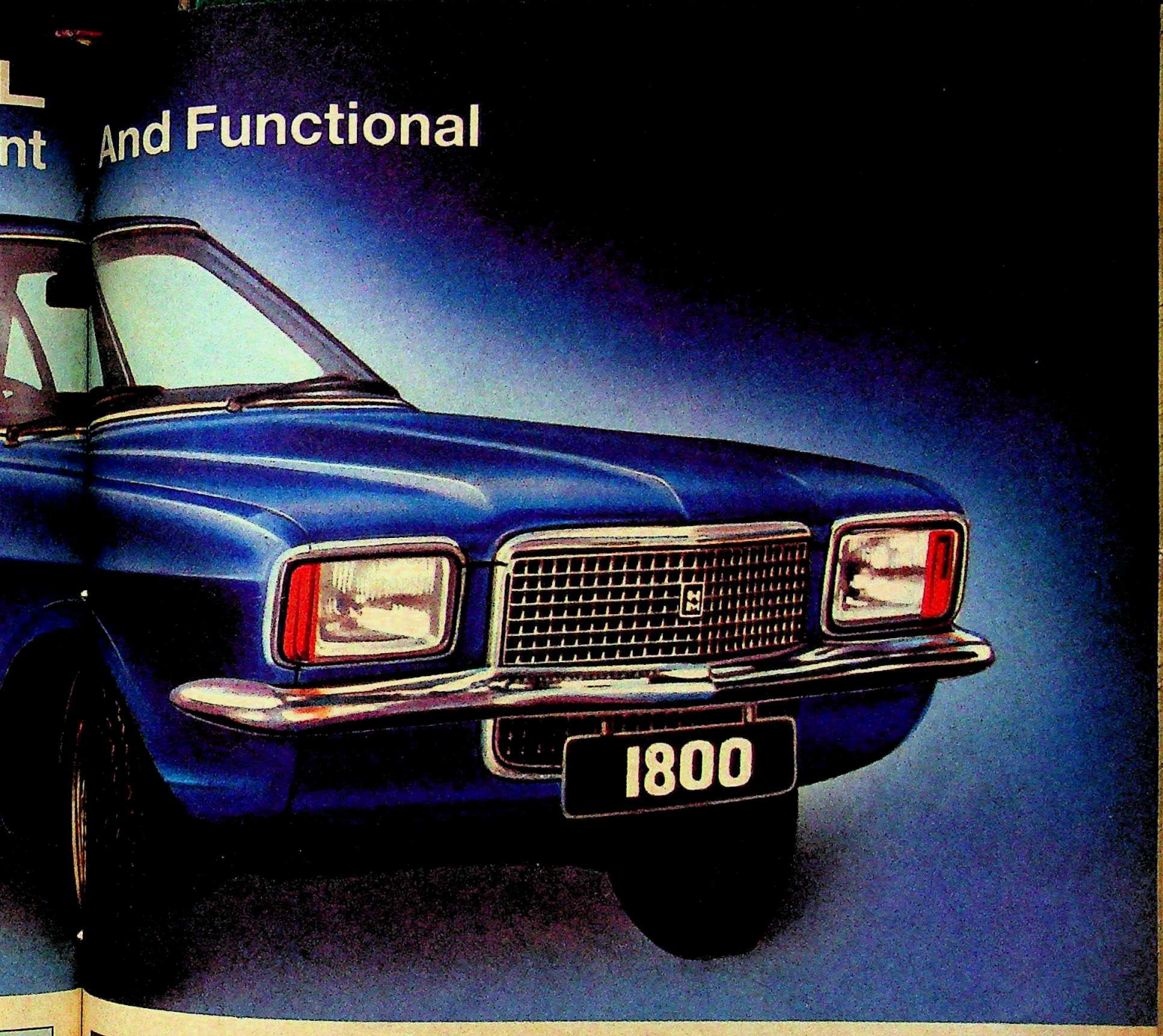

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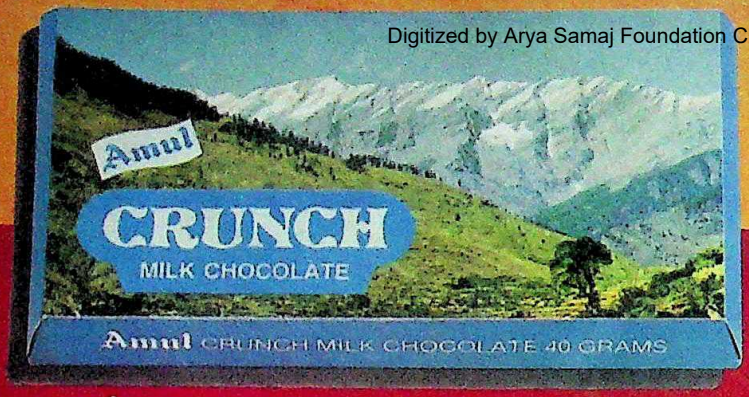

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Sailing into Trouble

A minor administrative slip up last fortnight cemented the feud between Bihar Governor Govind Narain Singh and Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad. During the Chhath festival both men decided to cruise down the Ganga and two motor launches were readied for them. But when Singh arrived all set to sail, he discovered that not only was his launch in a bad shape—unlike Azad's which was well decorated—it was also anchored at a dirty spot. Convinced of a

K.M. KISHAN

Azad (left) with Singh: an irreparable breach

ploy by Azad to humiliate him publicly, he sailed the next day—in an ordinary country boat hired by his staff.

So convinced was Singh that his gubernatorial dignity had been affronted, that he shot off an angry letter to Azad, breaking all ties with him. And informed sources say this was also the provocation which prompted Singh's airdash to Delhi to ask the high command to remove either him or Azad from the state.

The Singh-Azad tussle had, in fact, come out in the open some months back when the former sent a letter to Rajiv Gandhi that stated: "To argue with the chief minister is like wrestling....He does not know anything about the law or constitutional status of the governor....He never listens to anything unless threatened....My life has become miserable....Please tell me what I am supposed to do?"

Wonder what Rajiv had to say to that?

The GNLF's Little Fiefdom

THERE is indeed a corner in West Bengal where the CPI(M)'s writ does not run. This became clear during the run up to the Hill Council elections in Darjeeling district, scheduled for December 13. So firm is the grip of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) on the region, that the CPI(M) is more or less prepared to gracefully concede the Hill Council to it.

True, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu will be visiting the Darjeeling hills for the first time in over two years to launch his party's campaign. But the CPI(M) has clearly decided to play safe and not provoke the GNLF into a direct confrontation. It would seem that the Marxists learnt a bitter lesson during the 26-month-long GNLF-sponsored agitation when their cadres were virtually wiped out from the hills. Said a CPI(M) leader: "We are going to do what the Congress(I) did in Punjab after signing the Punjab accord."

One certainly hopes that the outcome will not be as disastrous.

A Flooded Industry

AS if the depredations of man in the form of terrorism were not enough, Ludhiana's once-booming industrial units now have to cope with those of nature. Unprecedented flash floods two months ago ravaged nearly 200 units. Fifty, in fact, were still marooned, and hence unapproachable, when a Central assessment committee, led by the joint secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture, recently visited the town to inspect the damage.

A preliminary assessment by owners of the 150 affected units put the damage at nearly Rs 32 crore. With the units yet to resume production, many fear that the resultant unemployment of about two lakh workers could provide an impetus to terrorism. Also, as the memorandum submitted by flood affected industries to the Central committee pointed out, many units were engaged in exports and their closure implies a loss of Rs 3 crore per month in foreign exchange.

While many demands made by the affected industries seem unrealistic, like the one asking the Ludhiana Municipal Corporation to waive all taxes (including octroi) for five years, there is no denying that timely relief could help the Government redeem its image—a compelling necessity in the troubled state.

Groping in the Dark

THREE weeks after the Morvi explosion left eight members of a family dead, the Gujarat Police are still clueless. Though the blast took place in the heart of town near the police station, there was no eyewitness, nor a survivor to give evidence. "It's like finding a needle in a haystack," confessed Deputy Inspector General R.N. Bhattacharya.

He has good reason to be despondent. This was the fourth such incident in Saurashtra in 16 months—leaving a trail of 28 dead. The first blast in Wankaner in July 1987 killed a former MLA, Manzoor Hussein Pirzada, and four others. That case was closed for want of witnesses—a fate the Morvi case too is likely to meet. So baffled were the local cops that within a day of the Morvi explosion, descended top sleuths from Baroda and

Site of the Morvi bomb blast: heavy toll

Ahmedabad. Their report confirmed the worst fears: the devices used were similar to those that had set off the earlier explosions. Though these follow a disturbingly similar pattern there are no discernible threads to pinpoint the culprits. Said a senior police officer: "In Punjab, at least the police know who are behind the bomb blasts. But here we are totally at sea."

Pushed to a corner, the state Government has reluctantly handed the case to the CBI. As they've had little success in cracking it, they're claiming to see a deeper game: smugglers, anti-national elements, even political parties (read: the Opposition).

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BOMBAY

Manhattan Syndrome

No two cities could be so far apart and yet so alike. The similarities between Bombay and Manhattan are astonishing. Both cities are constantly on the move, both value super-achievers, neither city is xenophobic—both are brimming melting pots, blending all sorts of accents, pigments and languages into a goulash over the slow fire of enterprise. A report on what makes the two cities similar in so many respects.

WITH the flick of a switch, Nikhil Desai moved from the Sunday morning telecast of B.R. Chopra's epic to the wonderful and sensuous world inhabited by Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca*. "This *Mahabharat* stuff's lousy," he pronounced.

As the strains of *As time goes by* wafted through his one-bedroom-and-kitchen apartment, he looked around at his friends—all in T-shirts and shorts, sipping wine coolers (a fizzy, champagne-like spirit, suffused with the tang of apple cider) and munching nacho chips. "She's neat, isn't she?" he asked. "You bet," piped Rahul Varma, as he waded through Nikhil's CD (compact disc) collection. "Where did you pick up this?" he enquired, pointing to a rare recording of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert Von Karajan. "Oh that. Nisha and I picked it up on 47th Street," said Nikhil.

Nikhil, Nisha and Rahul don't live in New York. They work in an international bank and live in a Bombay suburb. But their sensibilities, tastes, attitudes and lifestyle, would do a New Yorker proud. They are part of a growing body of street-smart and sophisticated Bombayites. Impatient when faced with inefficiencies, they work hard and live well, and have nurtured pockets of Manhattan in Bombay.

They'd feel at home only in Bombay or New York. Other cities bore them and they are blase about the discreet charms of Paris or the stately grandeur of London, the tree-lined avenues of Delhi or the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong. They have the right gadgets and the right accents, they baffle chefs by ordering unheard of dishes and take great pride in discovering little-known painters.

The similarities between Bombay and Manhattan are astonishing: both value super-achievers and lack the time—or heart—to listen to hard luck stories. Neither is xenophobic—both are brimming melting pots, blending all sorts of accents, skin pigments and languages into a goulash over the slow fire of enterprise.

The city takes in everything that's new technology. Electronic meters for taxi cabs, call-waiting signals and paging beepers in coat pockets of hotel managers, and thick ice cream shakes at fast food parlours. What took the cheesecake was the dandiya raas at Juhu's Vile Parle scheme last year: the traditional Gujarati dandiya raas, which was already westernised with the introduction of disco, was transformed into laser dandiya, where Gujjubhais and Gujjubens jived to the tunes of Babla and Lalit Sodha with illuminated dandiyas (sticks) till dawn.

The result may be as tangy as a pao bhaji or as spicy as bhelpuri. But new ingredients would always be welcome—when last seen, bhelpuri had enticed the gourmet with nacho chips instead of the more traditional puris, and the venerable Italian pizza had been emasculated by being shorn of onions for the Jain eaters. Says Michael O'Donnell, vice-president, Citibank: "Bombay is not even Americanised, it is Manhattanised."

He is right. If you took Woody Allen blindfolded and placed him in front of the Cuffe Parade skyline, he might mistake it for the match-box-like skyscrapers he sees on wind-swept evenings across Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan. Fast-food parlours are infested with teeny-boppers clad in Calvin Kleins and Reeboks, with a

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Walkman casually slung over their hips, emitting sounds from *Born in the USA*. Restaurants offer as many cuisines as there are sub-nationalities in the city.

And at sundown, the city comes alive with sophisticates thronging bars at Happy Hour, where draught beer flows freely and the smart ones order wine with their dinner. "Hard liquor is out," says Naresh Chauhan who works with a multinational firm. "We've learnt to count calories," he adds. His favourite restaurant: a fashionable salad bar downtown.

Restaurants have begun respecting the new health consciousness. Menage a Trois (at the Taj) offers nouvelle cuisine. It also happens to be the right place to be seen at, if such things matter. Even at more traditional restaurants, like the Chetana Rajasthani, waiters make sure to ask whether they should give you a ghee-laden *khichri* or not. Shamiana at the Taj even has a non-smoking zone. Veena Malhotra, a yuppie banker, approves. "It is un-chic to smoke," she says. "At my parents' home we have a room in the front where the smokers can go. The rest of the house must remain smoke-free. They don't have the right to pollute our environment," she adds.

BESIDES going through a strenuous work-out at the health club of a five-star hotel thrice a week, Malhotra makes sure her coffee is decaffeinated and sweetens it with Sweet-and-Low. Her lunch could be a quick sandwich at the new Delicatessen at the New Oberoi—which offers rare meats like smoked ham and salami and promises of pastrami. Evenings she might go dancing, or to the bar with a couple of other women, without causing a scandal as it might in a hick town like Delhi or Madras. "Bombay lets you be what you want to be," observes Sarah Roberts of INDUS (an organisation of American women in India).

Desai, Varma, Chauhan and Malhotra are the type who colour their vocabulary with the latest Americanisms at the drop of a baseball. Wafers, therefore, become chips here, and chips become fries. Footpaths are sidewalks and petrol pumps are gas stations. You don't make trunk calls, you call people long distance. You don't negotiate, you cut deals or foreclose them.

It isn't just the Noo Yawk language that has permeated into Bombay. Even its rhythm and pace are getting ingrained here. Everybody in Bombay is on the run: from the incredible *dabbawallahs* ferrying mountains of food from Dahisar to Churchgate at breakneck speed to the yuppie executive, chomping mouthfuls of chicken roll in his hand while not waiting for the elevator and walking up, two flights at a time, to get to his desk. The slightest delay is frowned upon. Even a tiny hold-up in the bumper-to-bumper 5 p.m. exodus at Marine Drive is greeted by irritated horns, collectively and cathartically admonishing the old Parsi lady arguing with the taxi-driver for short-changing her and creating a gridlock.

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"*Age chalo age chalo*" is the motto of the bus conductor, and everyone, from the urban executive to his stenotypist wants to get past the guy in the front.

You don't wait at a restaurant for a table, you pick up a sandwich and walk back to work. You don't wait for buses, you hail a cab. And you don't sit idly in your car: there are probably more cars with backlights for the person in the rear seat to read while in motion than anywhere else. Bombay's collective psyche believes that time is money, and the ruling deity is not Ganpati, but the rupee. It is the culture of the buck, and the bigger the buck, the better.

And the older the buck, even better. It enables you to live in the plush, sylvan surroundings, with magnolia and hibiscus flower-laden gardens and cane chairs in lawns, at Carmichael Road or Silver Oaks Estate, because your forefathers had built this city on the strength of textile mills and agencies. There is the Parsi money of the Wadias, Tatas and of the Birlas, tucked away on various hills facing the sea. They are the Rockefellers of Bombay. There is the Gujarati money of the stock brokers, seen in the marble floors of apartments at Walkeshwar. They are the Steins and Bergers of Bombay. And there is the new money of the Ambanis and the Mehras, what the old moneywallahs see as Johnnie-come-latelys, or the Boon Pickenses and Trumps of Bombay, who seem to want to achieve in a thirty-second commercial spot all that the Tatas achieved in a hundred years. Despite the Reliance Cup and all that jazz, it is the old money that's respected; the new money is to be consumed.

Elsewhere in India, due to traditional humility or the fear of the taxman, you don't flaunt money. But in Bombay, you display it with the quiet elegance of Shyam Ahuja dhurries. Since the old town is out of bounds, new money resides in outlandish creations of a Hafeez Contractor or in one of the matchboxes at Cuffe Parade.

The Bombaywallah who sees himself as Joe Bom Yorker is more often than not willing to fit into the yuppie-mould. He is well-off but not yet rich. Eager to move higher and higher, he is willing to invest in a relationship only if the trade-off is worthwhile. He crunches numbers for a living on sophisticated computers instead of painstakingly using the grey cells. And at sundown, when the other officials have left, stereo music blares loudly in the office as the atmosphere changes to a party. But instead of jiving teenagers, you see yuppies in their late 20s, ties slightly undone, guzzling black coffee and cursing their PCs when the numbers do not tally. Five-star hotels located close by beckon tantalisingly. And if he frequents them, you can be sure who's footing the bill: his company or his expense account.

HIS trendiness arises from the fact that in Bombay the West is so accessible—through books and magazines, through word-of-mouth of travellers passing by, and through video films. The initiation starts early with Archie and Richie Rich. Teenage years are spent understanding the world through the eyes of Kerouac, Capote and Wolfe. Later, it is magazines like *Esquire* and *Vanity Fair* that shape his thinking. And the ultimate dream in life is America: a student visa, a scholarship, and an Ivy League university, here I come.

Joe Bom Yorker is likely to have received an elite education. It is possible that he has a post-graduate qualification, usually an MBA from one of the IIMs (Indian Institute of Management), and occasionally, from one of the Ivy League universities of the West. He is culturally open, but has only a nodding acquaintance with the Indian arts. Yet, he doesn't feel compelled to go for *ghazal* performances and shower the singer with hundred-rupee notes, as his counterpart elsewhere might do. In fact, he considers discretion a sign of class, and the muted colours of Shyam Ahuja dhurries personify his moods. When he comes by money—legally or otherwise—he doesn't like to flaunt it. He spends wisely, even when it is on inessentials.

Nikhil Desai and his type are professionals first—loyal to themselves and their careers. And they are cautious too; they don't become entrepreneurs. But they arrive: on the strength of credit cards, automatic teller machine cards (you need so many of them because in Bombay you need cash all the time) and promotions, expense accounts and memberships of exclusive clubs like the Belvedere at the Oberoi or the Chambers at the Taj, where you might find Air-India's Rajan Jetley hobnobbing with an editor, or the director

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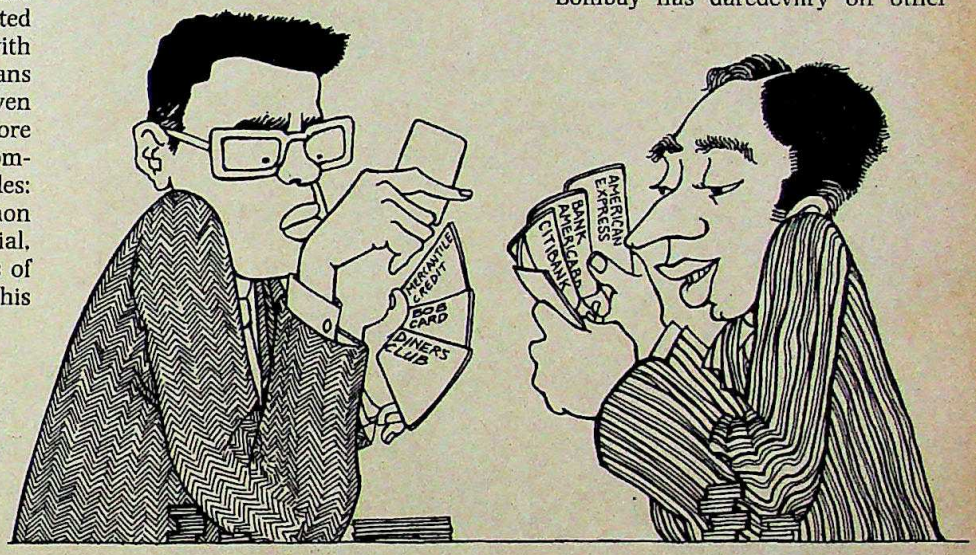
of a foreign bank courting a potential recruit who thinks he needs a salary higher than the gross national product of Bangladesh, and is sure he can teach the venerable gentleman a thing or two about how to "turn around" his organisation.

But despite his confidence in his own worth, Joe Bom Yorker does not shock by a crass display of wealth. The shocks he administers are more subtle. Chefs at the Oberoi are often surprised by discerning gourmets asking for Charolaise steak with Bordelaise sauce, along with sevruga caviar. "They even know how to pronounce Camembert," says an obviously delighted chef. And they finish their meals with black coffee, something the Americans invented. The daring health freaks even ask for, and get, salt-free butter. The more venturesome ask for specialised, custom-made liqueurs and cocktails. Samples: cognac with cardamom, clove, cinnamon *flambed* and served; or vodka with cordial, crushed pepper and honey. Epicures of Chinese food ask Nelson Wang at his famous restaurant, China Garden, for abalone, bird's nest soup, or *choi sam*. "Bombay is the Manhattan of India," Wang agrees.

At Kemp's Corner—fancied as the Fifth Avenue of Bombay—close to China Garden, is the Interplaza, formerly Intershoppe, now being transformed into India's first mall. The 8,000-sq ft complex will feature prominent brand name merchandisers (electronic goods, jewellery, shoes and accessories, with an airline/travel agency and a snack bar thrown in) along with an Intershoppe. Says Nancy Chopra of Intercraft: "Bombay is the trendiest city and the shopper here wants everything under one roof." And a microscopic Bloomingdales—the New York department store nearly the size of an Indian five-star hotel—is what Intershoppe would like to call itself in Bombay's surrealistic world of mock-Manhattanism.

Other boutiques like Ensemble try to look like Saks Fifth Avenue but the dilapidated structures alongside remind them, to their eternal regret, that they are still in the Third World. "Bombay worships exclusive labels," says Christopher d'Rosario, award-winning copy-writer, and points out the row of shoe-sellers at Churchgate Station which has become a veritable shoe bazaar. Every self-respecting shoe there wants to be called Nike or Reebok even if its pedigree is questionable. "But even lower middle class guys will pick up these and feel they are getting value for money," d'Rosario adds.

But nobody is more tuned in to New York (pronounced Noo Yawk) than the trendy teenager. It all begins with music and movies—Bombay's teenagers are remarkably savvy about what's hot in the Big Apple (the Manhattanites' nick-name for their city.) They sport "I love NY" T-shirts and casually step into custom-notified shops like States Boutique at Kemp's Corner. "All my clothes are from the States," crows Ajay Khatau, pointing to his faded denims and stud jackets. He got his Levi's for Rs 400 and his Reeboks cost him Rs 500, "but it's been worth it".



GONE are the days when you saw a girl wearing a T-shirt saying: "My boy-friend went to Harvard but all he sent me was this lousy T-shirt." Instead, you will see her clad in an attractive T-shirt or sweat-shirt saying, 'Sydenham' or 'Xaviers', two of Bombay's trendiest colleges. And in place of the once-popular Snoopy, her Maruti will have a Garfield dangling near the mirror, somnolently saying: "I hate my traffic warden."

The fat and lazy Garfield is the mascot of the New Generation. Tiny tots near Sasoon Dock in Colaba do perfect imitations of ice cream cone eating or dog routines of breakdancing. Only recently, when Hemu and Farha (Indian dancing sensations) announced a show of Dirty Dancing based on a film by the same name, every self-respecting teenager took his lady (girl-friend) along to the expensive Leela Penta Hotel, paying Rs 175 per ticket, filling up the 800-capacity hall in less than an hour.

For those in the early teens, agonisingly locked in the disciplined environs of a high school, the latest sensation is Rad. "Lets rad," says 15-year-old Shyamal Swali to Piyush Soni, as the BMX Bandits take over Scandal Point at Breach Candy, performing mind-boggling contortions on their BMX bicycles whose handles can turn 360 degrees. They draw their inspiration from a film simply called *Rad*. Their bikes can be made to stand on the rear wheel alone, and they can prance around as if they were on rodeo bulls, or whip their bicycles in semi-circles, practising up to eight hours a day.

Bombay has daredevilry on other fronts too. Restaurants have changed ground rules. "Nothing is sacred," says an assistant food and beverages manager at a five-star hotel. "Women ask for everything, from the ashtray to checks and even the drinks menu," he adds. And a western diplomat suggests—with his finger firmly on the pulse of the city—that Bombay is now ready to have its first singles bar for lonely hearts.

Wang opened India's first all-womens club, Nelson's Piano Bar, in late October. Membership of the club will be limited to 250, strictly by invitation. Wang's invitees include such high-profile women as Jaya Bachchan, Marshneil Gavaskar, Hema Deora, Jamini Ahluwalia, Maureen Wadia, Sunita Pitamber and Sharon Prabhakar-Padamsee. "It will be the cream of the society," he says, adding: "I find it strange that the lady who is often the perfect hostess and who organises a great party is not given recognition. It is to her that I have dedicated my club. The ladies can entertain their guests there." There are possibilities of a tie-up with a Chicago club. "Everything is possible in this city," he asserts.

Women enjoy the kind of freedom

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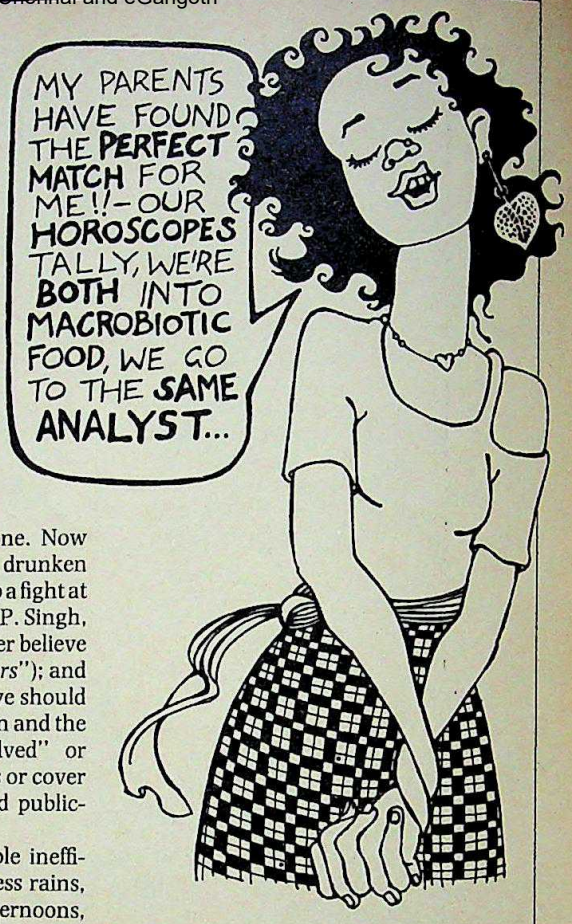
only known in the wild west: they can blow smoke rings sitting alone or with others at a bar and not be assumed that they're waiting to be picked up; they can ask for a check or an ashtray, wear skirts to work, and be certain that only a rare psychopath will tease them.

EVEN unusual life-styles seem run-of-the-mill here. The city has a business-like attitude, and it matters less where you come from than what you do. A copy-writer confesses: "This city accepts me for what I am (he happens to be gay) and my agency judges me by my work, not by whom I sleep with." O'Donnel concurs: "The social structure is receptive and accepts everything. If you do something crazy anywhere else, the whole town will know. Here you can lose yourself."

But while Bombay respects your privacy it can also drive you crazy with its street urchins performing India rubber contortions in the hope of extracting a 25-paise coin, its grown-up men and women who incoherently abuse their real or imagined tormentors, its pot-holed roads, its buses which like birds of paradise shun the night and rain—or like mad dogs, come in packs of 10—and its chatty cab drivers.

The last fall into various categories: the philosophers ("Marutis may be fast, but the slow and steady win the race" or "The days of honesty are gone. Now taxi-drivers are beaten up by drunken patrons at night. I never pick up a fight at night"); the bores ("Rajiv or V.P. Singh, everybody is corrupt" or "Never believe the politicians, they are all *chors*"); and the psychopaths ("I tell you, we should drop an atom bomb on Pakistan and the Punjab problem will be solved" or "Women who don't wear saris or cover their heads should be stripped publicly").

In spite of every imaginable inefficiency, the city works. Ceaseless rains, sweltering summers, sultry afternoons, or dark nights, the lights don't go out. Even the laggard public utilities realise that Bombay means business, and they can't afford power outages. At the same time, if you haven't paid your dues, your telephone or power supply will get cut off. You can't jump the queue: for a Maruti or for the bus, or at a fast food counter, even if you are the daughter-in-law of the under-secretary of the department of steel and mines. In incessant rains, suburban trains continue undeterred, wheel-deep in water, looking like gigantic but ugly gondolas in a vast river that the arterial railway lines resemble.



Desai cannot live anywhere else. He may occasionally wonder whether it has been worth leaving his hometown for the material comforts the city has offered him. He may even scream the next time he is in a Manhattan-like gridlock: "This is it, I'm leaving next year." But soon enough, he finds he's been here 15 years living above a neighbour he hardly knows, travelling down south daily by a noisy suburban train about which he knows he can't complain because he's driven by the lure of the rupee.

Bombay's like that: metamorphosing the most determined individual into a quintessential Bombaywallah. Its ultimate triumph comes in the form of food. The New York cheesecake is available in Bombay now. But the flavour is: mango.

—SALIL TRIPATHI

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The Kirloskar Electric Challenge Series

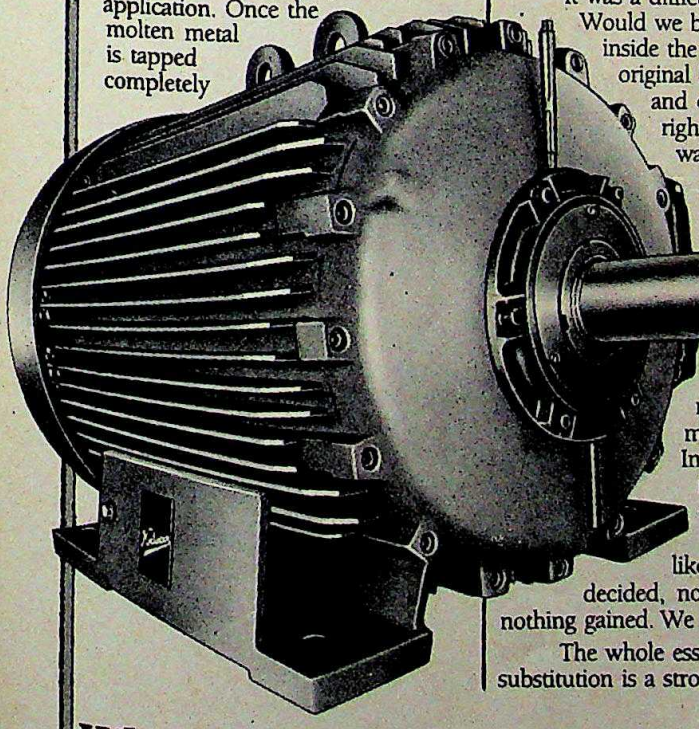
Sure, you know that Kirloskar Electric is a leading manufacturer of AC motors in India.

But did you know that Kirloskar Electric designed and developed the replacement for Russian mudgun motors with hardly any specs for the first time in India?

The story of the mudgun motor we supplied to the Bokaro Steel Plant is one of bizarre coincidences. But the moral of the story is clear: there is more to the specifications of a motor than just the rating.

Some time back, Heavy Engineering Corporation obtained our standard 50 kW motors for the Bokaro Steel Plant through one of our agents. Some time later a Kirloskar Electric technical team held a seminar on the selection of motors for specific applications, at Bokaro. By chance, the Bokaro engineers asked them about the suitability of the standard 50 kW motors for mudguns. This was the first time we learnt what job our motors were supposed to perform.

Mudgun motors as you know are for an extremely specialised application. Once the molten metal is tapped completely in a blast furnace, a mudgun has to seal the outlet with wet clay instantly. A failure of the mudgun motor can be disastrous.



Our engineers pointed out that mudgun operations require motors of a highly specialised design since these motors require an extremely high torque for short periods. They work with multiple starts and stops in high ambient temperatures. They also have to withstand extended stalling conditions because of the sticky nature of the clay.

We explained that it would take a few months to design a new motor. Would they still be interested? They said yes but they added that there were hardly any specs available. It was their turn now to ask "Would we still be interested?"

It was a difficult question. Would we be able to get inside the minds of the original Russian designers and draw up the right specs? And that was not all. Even the mounting dimensions of the Russian motors had to be adhered to. These motors had never been manufactured in India. Were we then rushing in where angels fear to tread? Quite likely. But, we decided, nothing ventured, nothing gained. We said yes.

The whole essence of import substitution is a strong and experienced engineering team with the patience and the commitment to work for years till they design and manufacture an identical replacement for the original. Plus one other critical factor: the total involvement and continuous guidance of the customer. We were lucky. We had both.

We went back to the drawing board and designed a completely new motor to meet the special requirements of this application. Our new mudgun motor has been working faultlessly since then.

All the trouble we took was well worth it. Because Bhilai Steel Plant and others placed orders with us for similar motors.

What, you may well ask, makes us take on such challenging jobs that others won't touch? The truth is standard motors — small, medium and large — are our bread and butter. We make them with an enormous amount of care because our livelihood depends on them. But it's the really tough jobs that give us our kicks. We don't just thrive on them, we need them to feel alive. What we are doing is developing technological muscle and invaluable expertise and experience. It saves the country crores in foreign exchange. And it does wonders to our self-confidence and the confidence our customers have in us. They know that when nobody else can do the job, Kirloskar Electric will.

KIRLOSKAR ELECTRIC COMPANY LTD

Regd. Office: Industrial Suburb, Rajajinagar, Bangalore 560 010.

When nobody else can do the job, Kirloskar Electric will.

Pratibha /KEC/25/88

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AIR-INDIA

The Maharaja's Travails

Rajan Jetley's reforms raise the hackles of Air-India old-timers

HE behaves like a *desi* Iacocca trying to transform the moribund Air-India into a modern, efficient corporation. But his colleagues liken him to an Ayatollah thrusting his corporate ideology down unwilling throats with evangelical zeal.

The truth about Air-India Managing Director Rajan Jetley, 38, lies somewhere in between. In a hurry to reshape the haggard airline in his own yuppy image, Jetley made sweeping changes in top-level personnel, raised the hackles of his part-time chairman, the last board of directors and key operations, engineering and commercial department staff. More recently, his product improvement and belt-tightening measures had pilots, engineers and overseas-based station managers up in arms. The result was a spate of flight disruptions, delays and cancellations which stranded thousands of passengers around the globe. Passenger confidence was so shaken that, even as the airline restored normal services, a direct flight to London (AI 129) took off from Bombay on November 18 carrying a lone passenger, coddled and cosseted by 20 crew members. An earlier flight to London, had only nine passengers.

The damage done to Air-India's reputation by the seven-week agitation is going to be difficult to repair. Over 100 flights were cancelled and at least 250 delayed by over 6 hours, stranding around 8,000 passengers at different stations around the globe. Air-India's links to Geneva were cut off for three weeks and there was no flight to Sydney for two weeks.

As an uneasy truce took effect last fortnight between the management and ground engineers and pilots, a new crisis loomed on the boardroom front. Air-India's part-time Chairman Ratan Tata, 51, who disapproves of Jetley's management style, sought a meeting with the prime minister to submit his resignation. Tata had complained to Rajiv Gandhi twice in the past year about the unilateral way Air-India was being run. And while pressure was being exerted to get the prime minister to intervene in the affairs of Air-India, an intriguing note surfaced in the Planning Commission recommending that the airline be privatised. The note, part of the report of the National Committee on Tourism, was sent to the Planning Commission by the Prime Minister's Office. The Planning Commission rejected the idea, knowing that the house of Tatas would be favoured bidders.

Was the recent trouble just another agitational hiccup which the airline will forget, or does it signal the existence of a deeper malaise, a flawed corporate culture, which, Jetley says, will have to be excised if the airline is to survive in a ruthlessly competitive industry? Opinion on this is divided. Many of the steps that he initiated were needed, say Air-India old-timers, and Jetley took unpleasant decisions his predecessors had avoided.

In 18 months as chief executive Jetley has tried to break the hold of the major unions. Last year he crushed a strike by the cabin crew association. Some months ago he challenged the might of the Indian Pilots Guild (IPG) by forcing the 747 commanders to fly ten and a half hours instead of nine. Then he cancelled the privilege of first-class air travel of about 1,300 managers and withdrew the facility of chauffeurs provided to all station managers overseas.

Few disagree with Jetley's avowed objective of improving the quality and exclusivity of Air-India's first and club class service. Nor with his attempts to restrict staff travel in these classes. The elite first-class passengers who pay Rs 60,000 to fly from India to New York frequently complain to Air-India about upgrading of economy class passengers who pay only Rs 14,000 and yet travel in first class. Another grouse is that cabin crew pay more attention to Air-India officials and their families travelling free in first class.

"It can be a bad scene," concedes part-time Chairman Ratan Tata. Families of staff members treat the first-class like a parlour loudly discussing sewing-machines and refrigerators and foreign postings, as their children run noisily up and down. "I have seen it myself and it's irritating" says Tata. Some years ago an official's three-year-old daughter went around the first-class cabin dripping juice

Air India: troubled times

RAJAN PODUVAL

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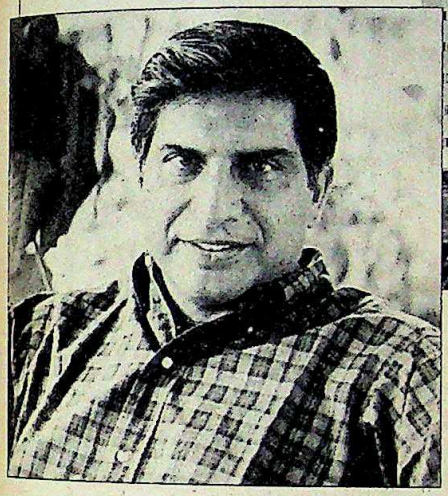
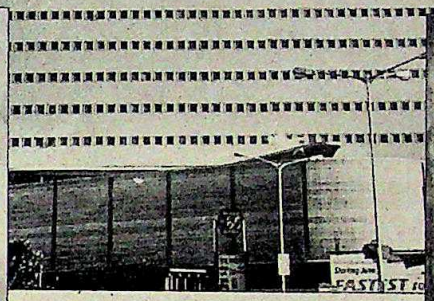
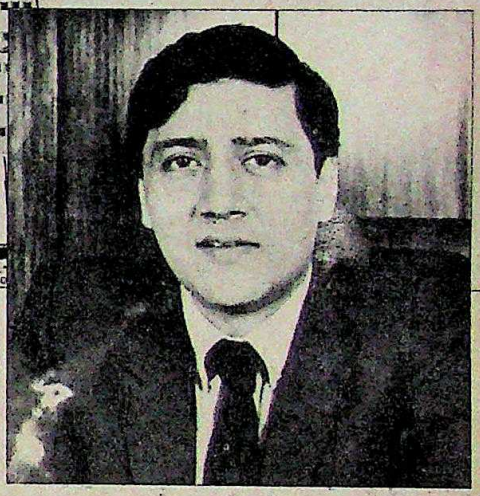
"The stick alone does not work. There has to be motivation; you have to carry your employees with you," says Tata.

"No major coporation had been turned around without major changes in personnel and style. Look at Chrysler and British Airways," says Jetley.







from the mango she was eating onto the seats and carpets.

THERE is agreement also on the need for economy in expenditure on staff perquisites at a time when the airline is operating at a loss. But Jetley's manner and style rubs the *burra-sahibs* of Air-India the wrong way. They consider themselves very proper in a colonial British sense and proudly flaunt their Cambridge and Oxford ties. Jetley wears jeans to work. As a concession to formality his casual ensemble is sometimes topped with a jacket. "This man wears black shoes with cream coloured jeans" an indignant manager complained in all seriousness. Worse, Jetley swears, curses and peppers his staff with four letter words. A go-getting M.B.A. from America he is geared to the achievement of goals. But old-timers in Air-India are horrified that with him, the ends matter more than the means.

Part of the problem is Jetley's iconoclastic disdain for Air-India's Maharaja: an anachronistic symbol which raises expectations which the airline cannot fulfil. He is intent on changing its image. A US-based consultant is designing new livery for the planes, new interiors, new logo, letter-heads, and uniforms for air hostesses and pilots. The existing uniforms of pilots and cabin crew which has been unchanged for nearly 20 years remind passengers of East European airlines, a board memorandum pointed out.

The drastic reforms Jetley had already ordered left observers with the impression that he enjoyed boundless clout with the powers in Delhi and presumably also a *carte blanche* to whip Air-India into shape. Jetley demonstrated his power by locking horns with the then minister of civil aviation Jagdish Tytler over senior appointments. He split the engineering department in two, changed the directors of engineering and finance. Malik resigned as commercial director and so did deputy managing director C.L.Sharma. At his instance some members of the board of directors inimical to him were dropped when the board was reconstituted. The message was clear even to Chairman Ratan Tata.

Tata and Jetley owe their differences partly to the fact that both are young, and strong-willed with a successful track record. But Tata says Jetley is not a team player and he would never hire Jetley to head a Tata organisation. After suffering quietly for over years, Tata finally broke silence on his differences with Jetley. Air-India staff members are "tremendously demoralised and demotivated," Tata told INDIA TODAY. Ground engineers and pilots had complained to him that the airline was being run by "unilateral actions and administrative orders rather than dialogue. I believe their point of view deserves consideration because every employee has a right to be heard." On revocation of first-class privileges for managers, Tata said: "You cannot unilaterally take away a privilege people have enjoyed over the years, rightly or wrongly. It needed discussion. The stick alone does not work. There has to be motivation; you have to carry your employees with you."

The pilots, for example were annoyed that their flying hours were increased, not through negotiation but by an "administrative order" issued by the Operations Director D.S.Mathur. By increasing flying time from nine to ten and a half hours, Air-India could fly from India to London non-stop in nine and a half hours, cutting out the Dubai layover. Such rationalisation was needed. Earlier, when pilots were flying a maximum of nine hours Air-India was forced to include Dubai as a stopover on the India-London route. This meant that after a three and a half hour flight to Dubai, the pilots and 20 crew members made an overnight stopover at Dubai, while a new crew took the flight on to London. This meant that four sets of cockpit crew were needed for one return India-London flight. Some time back, when Air-India operated only one

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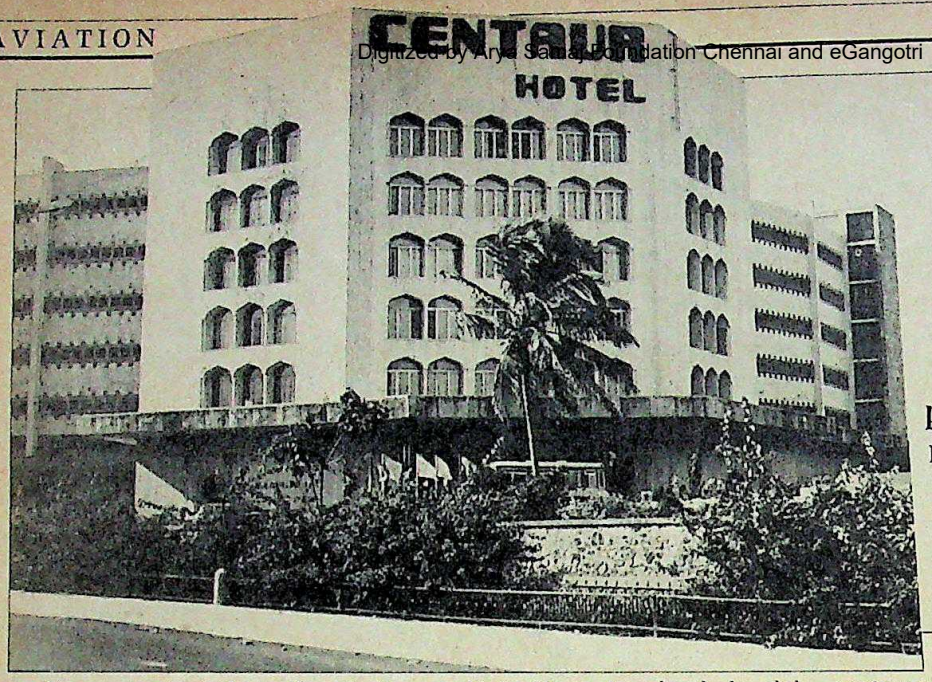

Jetley says it has not yet been decided to sell the Air-India subsidiary Hotel Corporation of India. He personally favours retaining the two airport hotels at Delhi and Bombay.

weekly service to Sydney, the whole crew would get a free week-long holiday in Australia while awaiting the next flight back.

THE pilots challenged the administrative order but the high court refused to intervene. The management then offered to sweeten the bitter pill. Every 747 pilot who flew non-stop to London would get an allowance of $ 500 per flight, above the usual allowances. This bounty created resentment among Airbus commanders who felt short changed. Seizing on the September 22 order withdrawing their first-class travel facility Airbus commanders started reporting sick and 20 senior pilots refused to act as check pilots saying the compensation —Rs 300— was insufficient for a job that involved higher risk. The guild even passed a no-confidence motion against Jetley and Mathur. "The entire training has come to a stop," said Mathur, "I will have to take action. Their refusal to undertake check flights is a dereliction of duty." Responded Captain P.B. Menon, vice-president of the guild: "There will be no powwow with them till they withdraw the administrative orders and reach a negotiated settlement with the pilots."

Ground engineers too began a work-to-rule. But after seven weeks, the management agreed to hold its first-class ban in abeyance and the engineers "volunteered" to travel in a lower class till the dispute was sorted out. To prove his point about the need to maintain the exclusivity of first-class travel Jetley announced that he and his family too would, in future, travel only by club class. "Nonsense," snorted his opponents. "He can fly on other airlines, who put all chief executives in first-class as a matter of courtesy." But the critics were temporarily silenced when, at the height of the agitation, Jetley's wife and children flew to New York in economy class because the club class was full.

Jetley defends his decision to dispense with overseas chauffeurs: "What sense does it make to maintain a chauffeur at places like New York at a salary of $ 1,638 (about Rs 23,000) a month or at Tokyo where, apart from a salary of Rs 26,300 a month we have to pay the driver a bonus equivalent to seven months wages," Jetley told INDIA TODAY. Chief executives of most international airlines do not have chauffeurs but every Air-India manager abroad did. "I am not against giving our managers a good life-style but it should have some relation to contemporary practices and our overall financial position."

As an additional cost cutting measure, Jetley sacked about 80 local staff in London and handed over ground handling of all Air-India flights at Heathrow to British Airways. Next on the list is New York, where Air-India maintains a staff of 214 employees to handle one flight a day. So pervasive was the cost cutting scare, that the airline had to officially deny rumours that employees' medical and other facilities were being cut.

Jetley's actions may be well intentioned, but, to succeed they need the staff's support, which does not seem to be forthcoming. With their chauffeurs withdrawn, some station managers started hiring expensive limousines to receive officials and VIPs.

Air-India officials say Jetley is so keen to show a profit this year that he intends selling off the Air-India subsidiary Hotel Corporation of India (HCI) and other airline assets including a company owned flat in Hong Kong, and two of the airline's older Boeing 747s. Jetley denies this. But the fate of HCI will be decided by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in the light of the recommendation by the National Committee on Tourism that it should be merged with the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). Shedding part of HCI would be in keeping with Jetley's style of getting rid of millstones. During his tenure at ITDC he gave up Delhi's Akbar Hotel. But he favours retaining the two airport hotels at Delhi and Bombay.

Bombayites, however, feel extremely possessive about Air-India and resent an aggressive whiz kid from Delhi turning the airline upside down, demolishing the feudal, laid-back life-style and perks of its officers.

Where Jetley is concerned, the issue is larger than the grievance of the airline employees. "No major corporation had been turned around without major changes in personnel and style. Look at Chrysler and British Airways," he says. Lackadaisical Air-India is a fit candidate for overhaul. But because Jetley is seen as ramming his reform through, the issue has got sidetracked. For several thousand employees the issue is not the changes that Jetley wants to bring, or even the corporate culture he wants to revamp. For them the issue is Jetley: Iacocca or Ayatollah?

—RAMINDAR SINGH in Bombay

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MAURYA SHERATON, DELHI, SPENDS VIRTUALLY NOTHING ON AIR-CONDITIONING.

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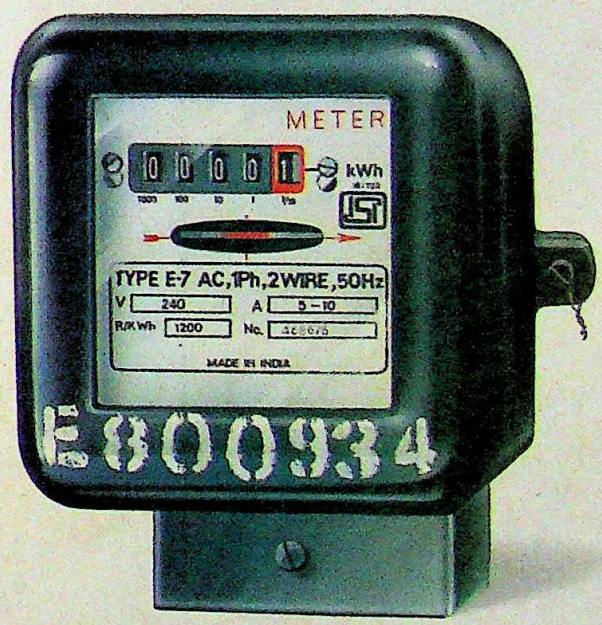

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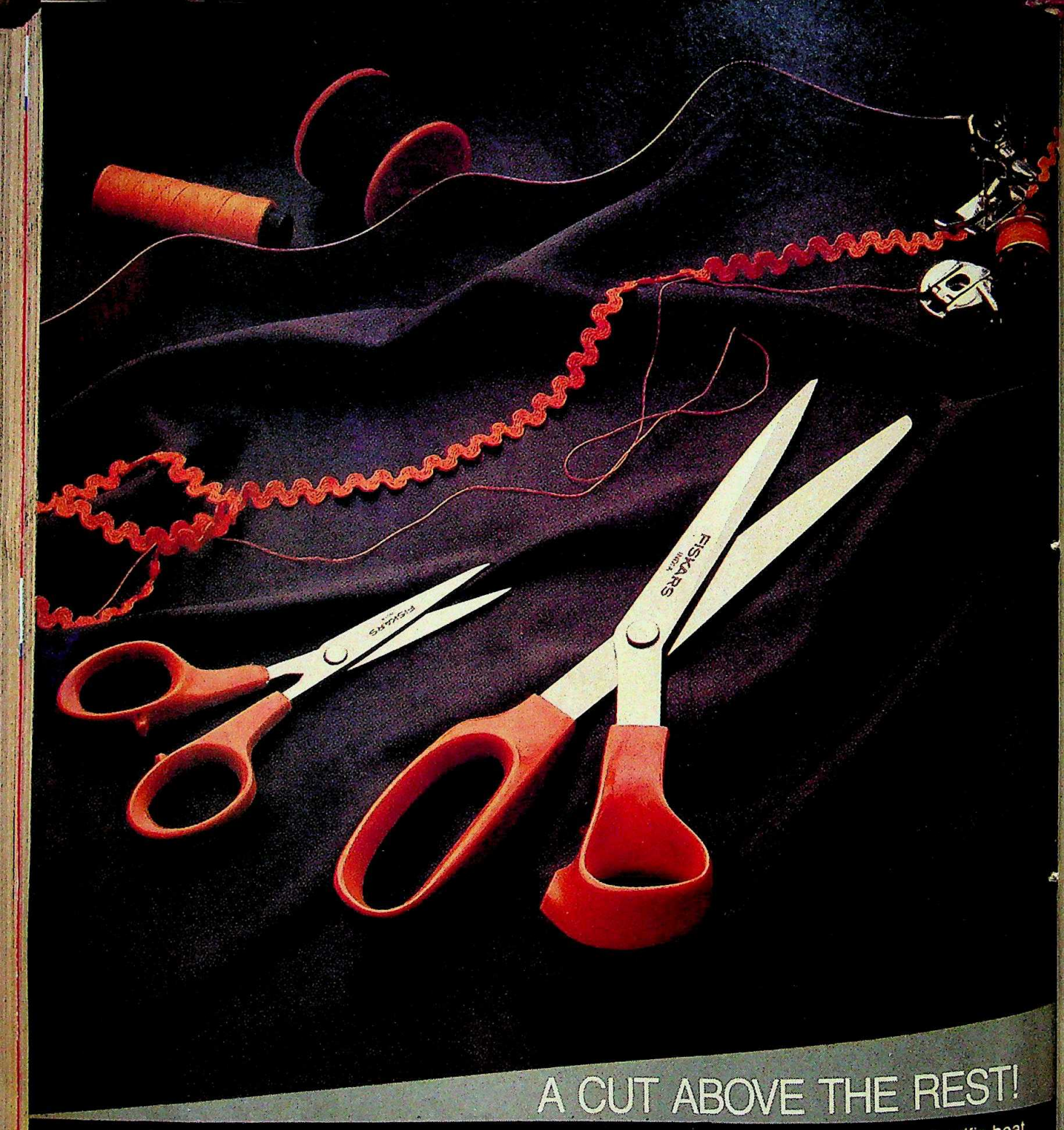

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WHITE KNIGHT

IS the Gammon India management scouting for a "white knight" to stave off a bid by Manohar and Kishore Chhabria for the Rs 100-crore construction enterprise? One option that Gammon India Managing Director T.N. Subba Rao is believed to be examining is to rope in a friendly bidder for the Bombay-based company. Led by Rao, the company's professional managers have vowed to fight the Chhabrias. The Chhabria brothers have built up a strong equity position (over 28 per cent) in Gammon India by buying shares from the market and from a branch of the Gammon family in the UK. But they seem to be keeping the management guessing as to their equity muscle—no shares have as yet been sent to the company for transfer. The management controls about 10 per cent of the equity, and collected 41 per cent of the proxy shares at the last shareholders' meeting. The company's equity is widely held by the public, and a proxy war cannot be ruled out.

EXCITING DEAL

THE state-owned Canara Bank has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with American Express—and the result could be some exciting new financial instruments. Both banks are examining a range of options—local and international funds transfer over the phone, a joint traveller's cheque—with a view to launching new instruments in India. Funds have been set aside for researching such possibilities. The MOU was signed some months ago but bank officials caution that no decisions have been taken as yet.

INTRIGUING EVENTS

THE Birla re-organisation plan seems to have run into problems—or so the hectic activity in several Birla company shares last fortnight seemed to suggest. The share prices of two K.K. Birla companies, Texmaco and India Steamship, flared up in Calcutta on what observers term "interested buying". Company sources say the increase in share prices is normal—Texmaco's prospects have looked up owing to a healthy order book position. But this does not explain why ailing India Steamship has suddenly attracted investor attention. Another intriguing factor is the reported differences between S.K. Birla and Aditya over a settlement to "unscramble cross-holdings". S.K. Birla has a sizeable equity stake in plum companies of the Aditya Birla group. Apparently, an amicable settlement was reached between the two Birlas recently. Now, according to informed sources, differences have surfaced over the price S.K. Birla had agreed to sell the shares for. Another round of negotiations is on the cards.

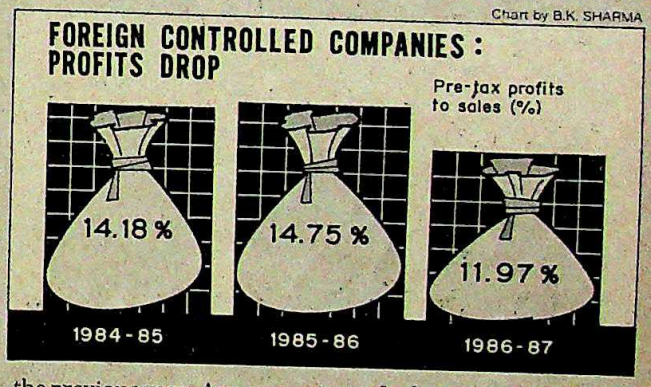
POWER CONTRACT

THERE are some indications that the Government will finalise a contract with CGEE Althsom to put up the Dul Hasti hydroelectric power station. The Government had granted a letter of intent for the Rs 800-crore Jammu & Kashmir-based project to the French firm in late 1986, but Althsom subsequently raised further demands, including exemption from income tax. So the contract's signing was inordinately delayed. At one stage, the Government had seriously considered cancelling the letter of intent. Now moves are afoot to patch up the differences. If these work out, the contract might be signed before next February, when French President Francois Mitterand visits India.

PROFIT SQUEEZE

EVEN as the Government encourages foreign investments in India, some disquieting news is emerging. Wholly-owned subsidiaries of foreign companies are, on the whole, proving to be less profitable than before. According to a government publication, the pre-tax profits of the 71 subsidiaries slumped by 15.05 per cent in 1986-87, compared with the previous year. As a percentage of sales too, pre-tax profits dipped in a three-year period (*see chart*). This has to be viewed against the backdrop of higher sales by these enterprises, and an expanded asset base. The reason for the dip in profits is not clear, but increasing competition in the market-place might be one explanation.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



NEGOTIATING A SPLIT

IF the two factions of the Modi family have begun negotiations on splitting their Rs 1,100-crore business empire, it's largely due to pressure from the financial institutions. Talks began last fortnight after one of Modi group Chairman K.N. Modi's sons approached K.K. Modi, who heads the other faction. A division of companies has been agreed on but discussions on Modipon continue. And at a board meeting of Modi Rubber on November 23, the institutions said that the fight had gone too far. They've established a majority on the board by getting the resignations of six independent directors. Also, a Delhi High Court order vacating the appointment of an interim chairman for Modi Rubber specified that the institutions could change the chairman any time (they hold 51 per cent of the shares). Clearly, Modi group Chairman K.N. Modi's position as chairman of Modi Rubber depends on the institutions.

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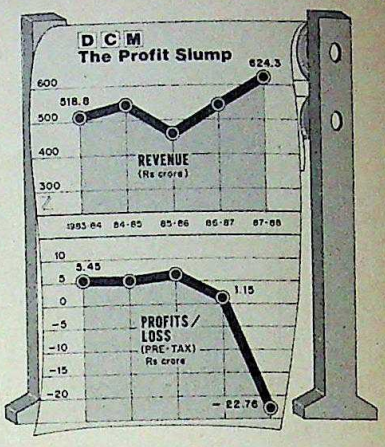
Charts by B.K. SHARMA

DCM

An Empire Divided

The ailing Rs 624-crore giant is split into three



CHAIRMAN Bansi Dhar has a lot of explaining to do. He'll probably tell shareholders at DCM's annual meeting on December 23 that the Rs 624-crore giant has become unmanageable but they'll fare better after DCM is broken up into three separate companies, that the profits of one division are now being offset by the losses of another and this will no longer happen, and also that the three can independently grow at a much faster clip.

Early last month, Chairman Dhar, Managing Director Vinay Bharat Ram and Deputy Managing Director Siddharth Shriram signed a document dividing DCM into three (*see chart*). Late last fortnight, the DCM board met to ratify the decision, and asked the managing directors to report back with detailed proposals on the viability of the three companies. In a statement to the press, the management said that DCM shareholders would be allotted shares in all the three companies. The idea is to make DCM into a holding company which will eventually be dissolved.

These dramatic developments seemed to mark the end of the sharp differences that have plagued the Shriram family for years and hastened the troubled conglomerate's trip down the road to losses. Around a decade ago, DCM occupied the fourth spot in the list of top 10 industrial houses. The latest financial results show a loss of over Rs 22 crore—partly due to a change in the accounting method—and there is a likelihood that the company may be off the dividend list for some years.

Yet there's little doubt that the partition proposal faces daunting problems, and at least one DCM board member is sceptical that it will work. Still, the three branches of the family had no option. Explained a source: "Each of the three at the top is looking for a job at the top, and wants to get out of the other's hair." Ergo, the new deal.

As per the agreement, Dhar bags the Kota complex of fertiliser, cement, and chemical units—almost half of DCM's assets. The complex once lost money and was on the auction block. But with demand for its products rising, it is expected to end the year with a profit of at least Rs 20 crore. On the other hand, however, Swatantra Bharat Mills, which is also under Dhar, is losing about Rs 30 lakh every month.

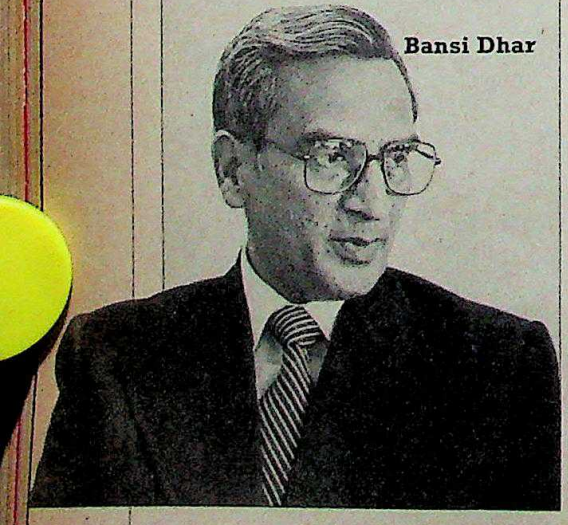
The Charat Ram side will continue to run companies such as Jay Engineering and Usha Sales, and will also assume control of Shriram Foods & Fertilisers, besides a sugar mill.

Apart from the profitable Shriram Fibres (SRF) and an engineering unit which it already runs, the Bharat Ram branch is to get DCM Toyota (which has had a rough ride in the market), and two losing units, DCM Data Products and DCM's textile mill in Delhi (whose closure is now before the courts).

While DCM Data Products is now being revamped, the profits from developing the textile mill land will go to the

The Bansi Dhar branch has got nearly half the assets....

Kota complex
(fertilisers, PVC, rayon tyre chord, cement)
Swatantra Bharat Mills
Daurala Sugar works

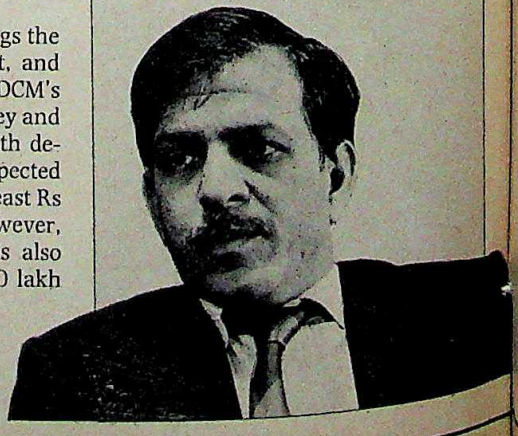


Bansi Dhar

The Charat Ram branch will control its profitable units....

Shriram Foods & Fertilisers
(vanaspati, chemicals)
Mawana Sugar Works
Jay Engineering Works
Usha Sales International
Shriram Refrigeration

Siddharth Shriram



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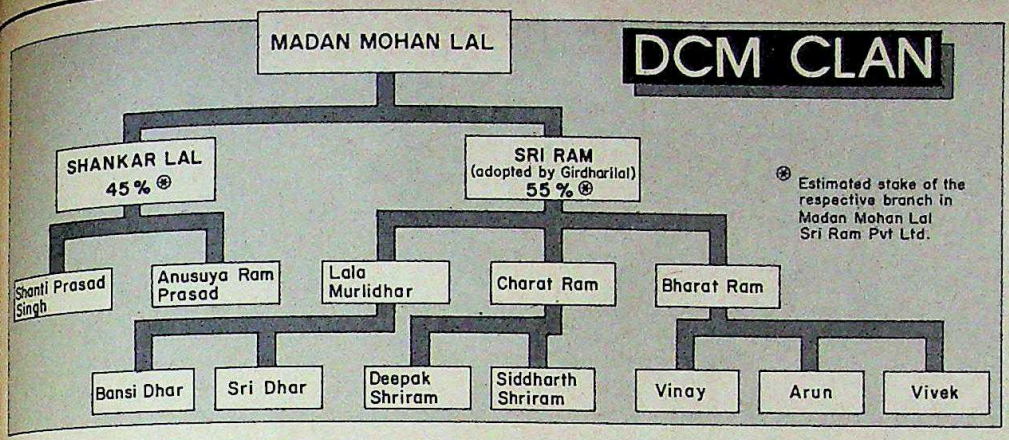


Bharat Ram side—if the Government ever flags off the controversial project. If it doesn't, hefty sums of money will have to be found to run it.

Even before DCM sources could argue that the restructuring into related product lines made sense, a financial daily reported that the Bharat Ram branch of the family had bought shares off UK-based businessman Swraj Paul through SRF and some of its companies, and that the purchases had been financed by the Delhi-based developers Ansal Properties.

A spokesman for the Ansals denied that they'd advanced any money. He explained that the Ansals were part of a three-way arrangement with DCM and Kailash Nath & Associates, another Delhi-based company, to develop DCM's mill property in Delhi, but said no money had been advanced.

NONETHELESS, someone had bought equity—raising the spectre of one branch of the family exercising its equity muscle to acquire a bigger slice of the DCM pie. In fact, the shares had been acquired much earlier, as part of a settlement between Paul and the Shriram family, although all of them had not been paid for.

DCM sources admit that SRF and some of its companies bought 5 per cent of DCM equity from companies controlled by Swraj Paul's Calcutta-based brother Jit, but insist that the family has a clear understanding that the shares would be equally divided among its three branches. SRF had financed the share purchases by drawing on its internal resources, they claim, adding that the timing of the purchase was a coincidence.

The family had made a commitment to Paul that it would pay for the shares. Paul's companies had written to the family a few months ago, asking it to meet its commitment, the family then said it would clear its dues by November 12, and Paul began exerting pressure once the date had expired.

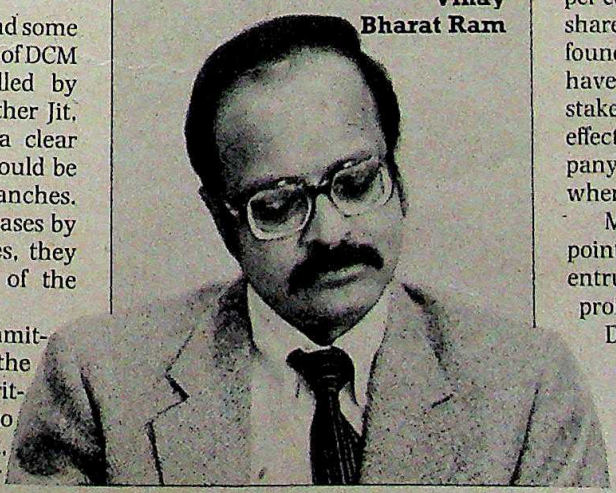
Contacted over the telephone in the UK, Swraj Paul confirmed that shares had been paid for. He said that the Shriram family had acquired his 13 per cent stake in DCM two-and-a-half years ago and addded that all the money had not been paid. The shares had therefore been held in an escrow account. "I believe quite a bit of money has been paid last week," said Paul.

In Calcutta, Jit Paul said that the DCM management had owed the Pauls Rs 9 crore, and that more than half of this had been paid up in 1986. Their Delhi-based broker Harish Bhasin had received most of the remaining dues last fortnight and DCM was supposed to provide Bhasin with a list of companies to which the shares were to be transferred but hadn't yet done so. Jit Paul added that the money was paid to Steelcrete Ltd and Surrendra Overseas Ltd, both of which are owned by the Pauls.

The Bharat Ram branch has got some troubled units....

DCM textile mill
DCM Engineering Products
DCM Data Products
Shriram Fibres
DCM Toyota

Vinay
Bharat Ram



Meanwhile, the partition proposal could run into several roadblocks. The management has to prove to the financial institutions, which hold 42 per cent of DCM stock, that each of the three new companies will be viable. What happens if they aren't?

Also, will all three new companies bear DCM's liabilities of roughly Rs 79 crore? And if DCM is to be a holding company, won't profits be taxed twice, once at the subsidiary stage and then again at the holding company level? Then, DCM has invested considerable money in a new cement plant and in modernising its sugar mills. So it's entitled to investment allowance, which the subsidiaries cannot claim.

Even more important, how will the Shriram family's cross shareholdings in various group companies be disentangled? None of the three branches have the cash to buy one another out.

The family's shares are held by a finance company, Madan Mohan Lal Shri Ram Pvt Ltd (it holds 8.5 per cent of DCM shares, with SRF and other firms taking the family's total stake in DCM to 20 per cent). The Shriram family is believed to hold 55 per cent of Madan Mohan Lal Shri Ram's shares. The descendants of DCM group founder Shri Ram's brother Shankar Lal have another 45 per cent stake—and so a stake in DCM. If partition is to prove effective, their equity in the finance company may have to be acquired. Again, where will the money come from?

More than one source conceded these points, but said the management would entrust the task of finding solutions to a professional firm. Although the mood at DCM is optimistic, the problems seem insurmountable—and Chairman Dhar has an unenviable task at the shareholders' meeting.

—PALAKUNNATHU G. MATHAI
with bureau reports

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MARKETING FAIRS

Games Companies Play

Firms evaluate strategies at management schools

It is pitch dark. Lightning flashes. You are sleuth Karamchand, investigating a murder. The clues are printed on different coloured tabs. Before identifying the criminal, tell us: do you prefer red, blue or yellow?

A housewife has to get hold of a diamond guarded by a dragon. To get past the dragon, she has to stitch a robe which will make her invisible. But first, which brands of thread will you choose from?

A wad of "Monopoly" currency notes are thrust into your hands. How do you spend the money? Do you scrimp or splurge?

GAMES people play? They are games all right—devised by companies for marketing fairs. All over the country, such fairs have become quite the rage. Hindustan Lever, Asian Paints, Bata India, to name just three well-known companies, are participating in fairs to confirm hunches, evaluate sales strategies and, perhaps, get a sneak preview of what the market may hold for their new wares.

At the Xavier Institute of Management and Labour Relations (XLRI) fair at Jamshedpur last fortnight, one game tried to ascertain which colours stick in the minds of people, while another game (sponsored by the State Bank) tried to find out whether credit cards would be widely acceptable. At Bangalore, Madura Coats tested consumer brand awareness about sewing threads.

The concept is simple. A hefty dose of market research is mixed with games of skill and chance in a typical *mela* milieu. People enter stalls put up on a lawn and play a series of seemingly ordinary games: coconut shy, hoopla, target shooting and so on. There's a catch: while the games are on, the players are adroitly asked questions about their preferences. Long queues form outside the popular stalls. And if a few get bored with the routine, there's a magic show, music, food and free gifts.

It's an unusual idea that continues to win adherents. Indeed, 10 years after XLRI pioneered the marketing fair, one management institute after another is climbing on to the bandwagon. The Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, will be holding its third marketing fair in January, while the Bangalore IIM has already conducted three fairs. In Bombay, two management schools have organised marketing fairs and the Institute of Management Technology, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, set the ball rolling last month. Many other institutions—at Mesra, Burdwan, Delhi, Varanasi and Bhubaneswar—are waiting in the wings.

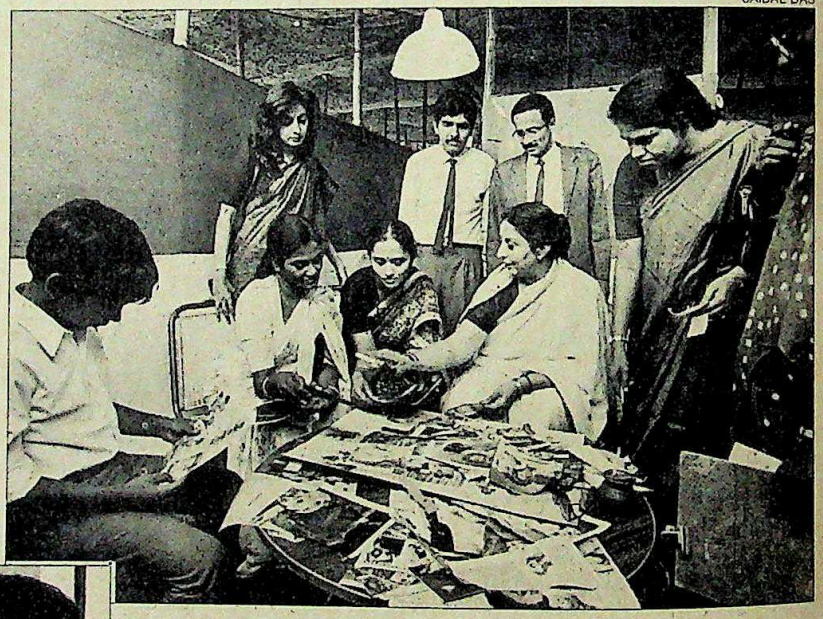
The *desi* management *mela* is even going global. A management school at Jakarta, Indonesia, is planning to organise a fair next year with expertise borrowed from Jamshedpur. And two Indian professors of marketing conducted a *mela* at Kingston, Rhode Island, US, last year. A similar fair was held four years ago at Detroit. Marketing fairs, it seems, have become an example of reverse technology transfer.

"In 1976, when I first mooted the idea of a marketing fair, nobody took me seriously," confesses Sharad Sarin, professor of marketing at XLRI, credited with having developed the concept of such fairs. Three years later Sarin's students converted the idea into reality and XLRI has not looked back since.

The crux of a marketing fair is that it allows for four-way interaction: among students, the teaching faculty, companies and the local community. Says Samar Das, product manager, Berger Paints (which has participated in four marketing fairs at Jamshedpur): "By simulating a real-life situation, we receive strong cues which narrow our options for subsequent research."

The company's rivals too have taken part in marketing fairs. For instance, Asian Paints has participated in fairs held at Jamshedpur, Bangalore and Ahmedabad. Hindustan Lever has shown up at the Jamshedpur fairs no less than six times, while Bata India and ITC have each participated five times. Just about every major consumer goods company has put up a stall at some marketing fair or another: Britannia, Brooke Bond, Reckitt and Colman, Kissan, to name a random few. So have banks, publishing chains, advertising agencies and space-sellers in telephone directory yellow pages.

SAIBAL DAS



XLRI fair; and Sarin (left): pioneering work

Feeling the pulse of the market is crucial in this exercise. So companies come seeking answers to several questions. How important is blind testing? Which advertisements are recalled and why? Why do people switch brands? Will a new product become a hot seller?

Lipton, for example, wanted to know whether a new chocolate spread that's

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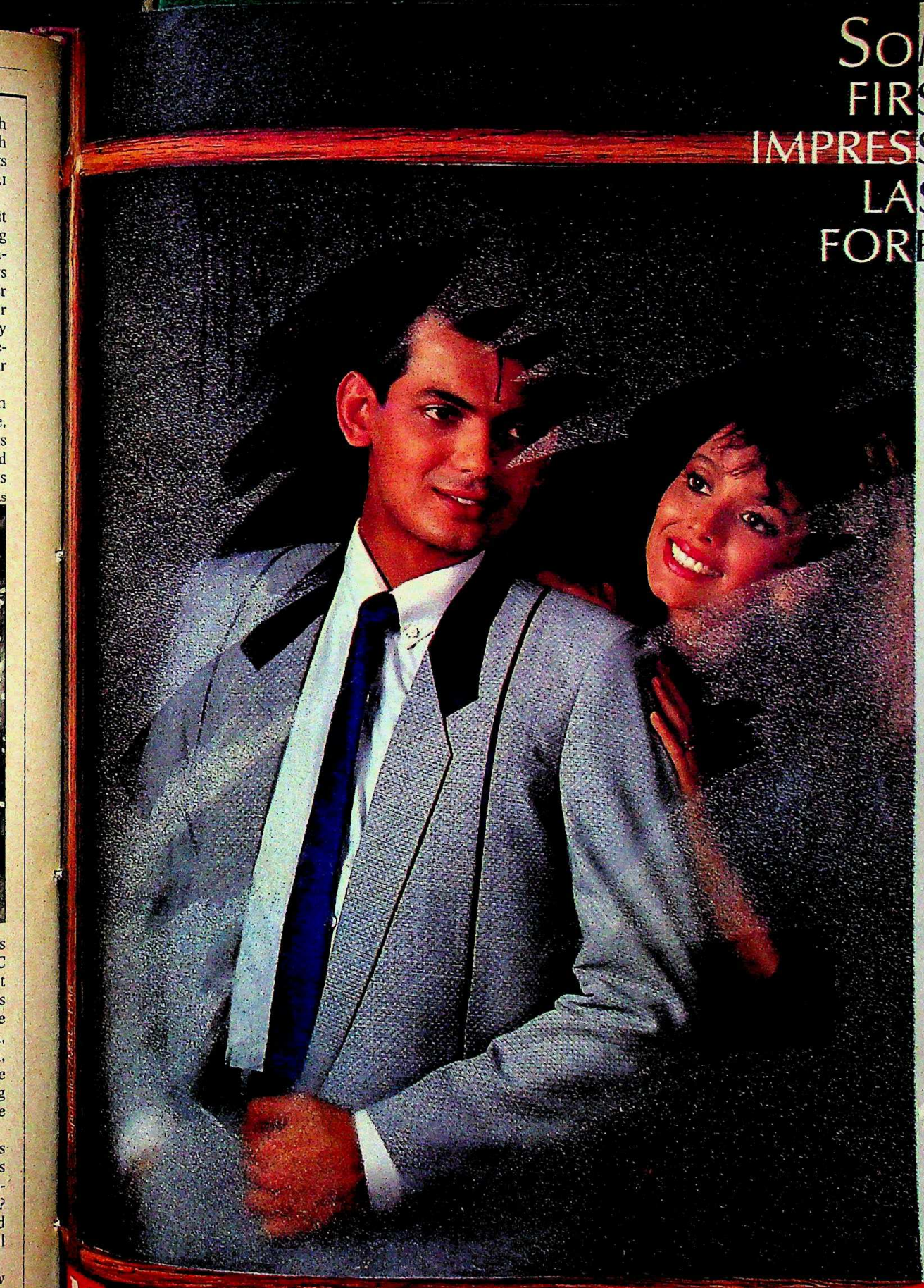

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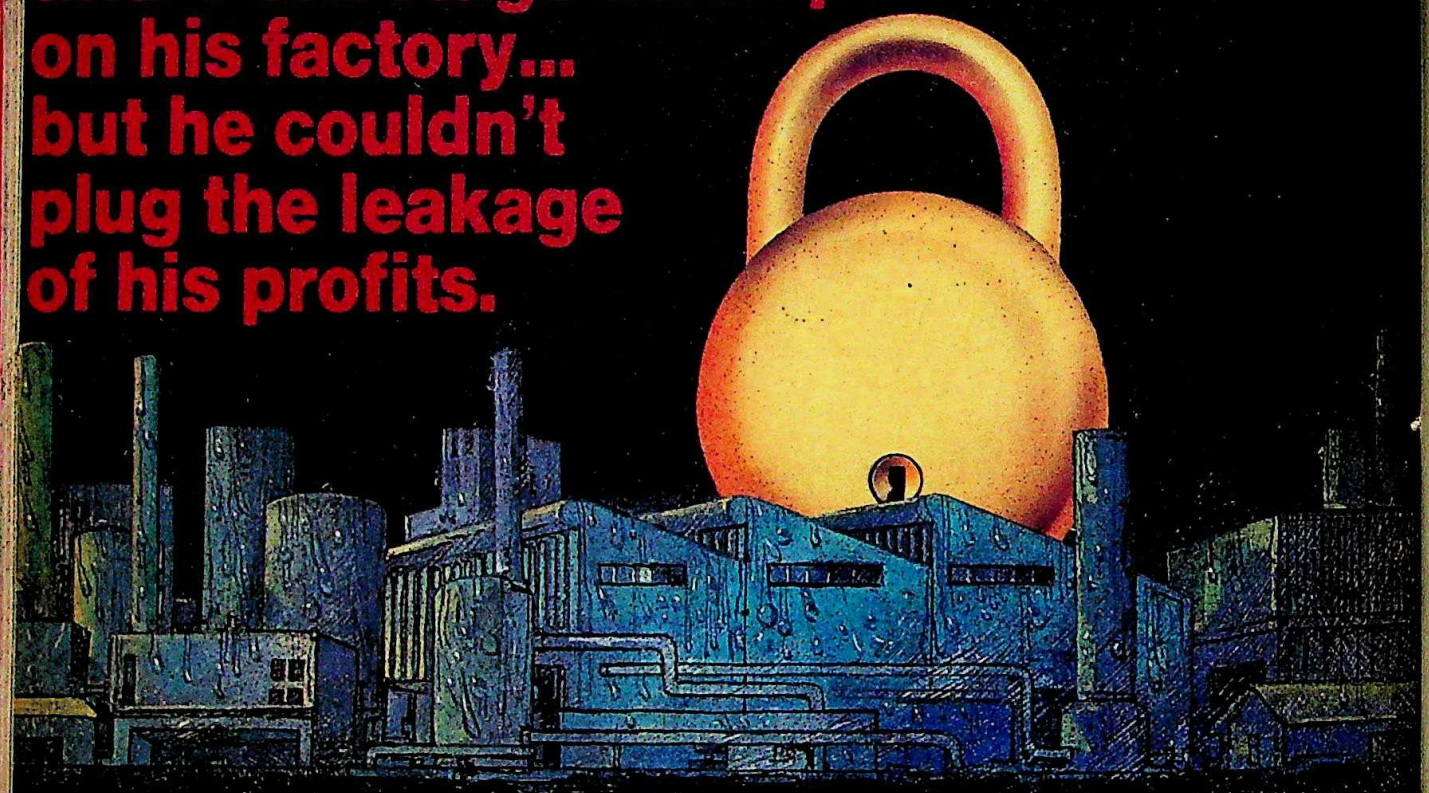
"A PROMISING PERSONALITY

M A Product of Mahendra Suitings Ltd., Ahmedabad.

Mahendra SUITING

Mr Patel blocked 5 burglaries, 3 takeover bids and 4 sabotage attempts on his factory... but he couldn't plug the leakage of his profits.



Yes, Mr Patel's factory fell a prey to water leakage. Because he neglected one vitally important security measure lasting waterproofing. So what with endless repairs and renovations over the years, his profits kept pouring down the drain.

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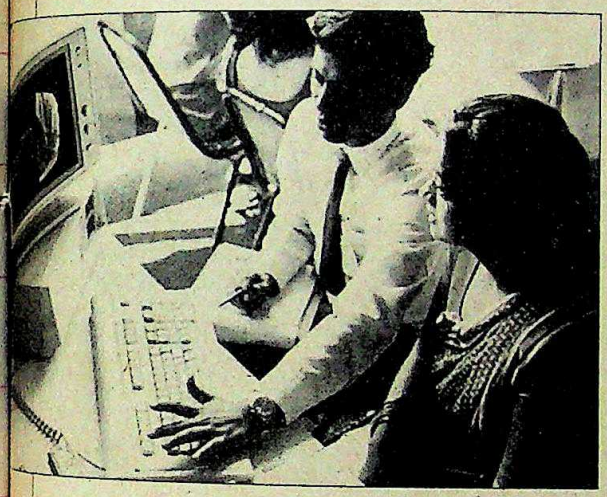
now being test marketed in Bangalore would tickle enough palates. Toiletries manufacturer S.V. Products found that there was a potential demand for an ayurvedic shampoo. The bill for this discovery—just Rs 10,000 in expenses at a fair, compared with Rs 15 lakh on conducting a comparable test survey in Bangalore. "If the fair results were negative, we would have recommended that the company not launch the product, thereby saving a lot of money," says Ramana Rao, operations director, Marketing and Advertising Associates, one of whose clients is S.V. Products.

The novelty of market research con-



Gathering data at Bangalore fair

ducted at a fair cannot be denied. Says K. Mahesh, a manager in the making at IIM Bangalore: "As the fair concept evolves, you can forget about the door-to-door surveyor with a dull and dreary questionnaire who has had many doors slammed on his face."

Companies participating in marketing fairs believe that the reactions that will be elicited will be spontaneous and unbiased. Explains Subhankar Ray, a student at the Ghaziabad institute: "A number of television companies, including Onida, Weston and Beltek, had stalls at our fair. Since these companies are rivals, we had to take special care to ensure that those who played the games did not realise that their responses were being consciously recorded." Adds Kapil Kapoor, a graduate of IIM Ahmedabad who now works for Food Specialities: "The questions should be inherent and concealed in the game."

Despite such laudable intentions, not all the games are equally effective. "A couple of games were dead giveaways, made different only because computers were asking the questions," observes Maureen Gonsalves who visited the Bangalore fair this year, adding quickly: "It was still an ingenious idea."

Although XLRI's Sarin argues that the element of bias that is likely to creep into this form of market research may also be present in other research techniques, a few management schools have stopped holding fairs. D.D. Patel, professor at the S.P. Jain Institute in Bombay, explains why his organisation discontinued the practice after having held four of them. "The participating companies were not fully satisfied with the research results. It was difficult getting the right kind of respondents, though there was an enthusiastic response from the student community."

A fair can only be conducted with the help of many students, as part of their course work. The Jamshedpur fair used the services of some 200 graduate students and an equal number of school students to run the stalls. A total of some 20,000 manhours were spent on the fair, including the submission of reports to companies. The students don't seem to mind. "Organising the fair gives us experience which prepares us better for our future," says K.K. Nair, general secretary of XLRI's marketing association.

Though marketing fairs have been primarily patronised by large companies, a few small entrepreneurs have also benefited. Sunny Alexander, who runs the small Bangalore-based Transtel Electronics, which makes graphic equalisers for music systems, found the fair useful in that it provided him a list of potential customers. "Even if I get 10 orders out of the list, I will consider the Rs 2,000 I spent worthwhile," says he.

Concludes M.L. Agarwal, associate professor at XLRI: "We will be more successful if we can refine the fair concept to include products of small industrial units which require considerable marketing efforts, and also involve respondents from rural areas—that is the real challenge." And given the interest that marketing fairs continue to generate, they are here to stay, the Cassandras nothwithstanding.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA in Jamshedpur with CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA

BATA

Dramatic Deal

Union-management concord

SELDOM do company managements present their workers with a charter of demands. And rarely do they get unions to accept them unconditionally. Yet the Rs 259-crore Bata India has done precisely this.

Last fortnight, it signed a dramatic agreement with the Bata Mazdoor Union (BMU) at Batanagar, its oldest unit, permitting the management to annul all shop floor agreements, scrap two departments and trim seven others, and raise labour productivity norms. The union also gave an assurance that it wouldn't object to the company farming out jobs to small manufacturers. Moreover, it agreed to accept new machines, technology and production methods.

Still, it wasn't a clean sweep for the management either. Members of the BMU executive declined to take a pledge to implement the agreement: face had to be saved, after all. Says Bata Managing Director V.K. Lamba: "The agreement is a victory for all."

The pact follows a 124-day lock-out at the losing Batanagar unit after the management accused the 9,000-strong workforce of indiscipline and go-slow tactics. It presented a "survival proposal" to the Government, making it clear that if the BMU didn't agree to 230 conditions, the lock-out would continue.

Chief Minister Jyoti Basu declared the lock-out illegal, the management stuck to its guns, the Government asked it to advance each worker Rs 2,000, the management refused, and the union finally caved in. Said a union leader ruefully: "There was no alternative."

The Bata concord has sent shock waves through labour circles, with labour leaders charging the Left Government with being soft on managements. All India Trade Union Congress leader Bhabani Ray Choudhury said: "The Government has let us down." Trade Union International Secretary A. Kolmakov, who flew down from the Soviet Union to Calcutta to express solidarity with the Bata workers, went so far as to remark: "We have been blackmailed."

Predictably, managements have cheered the pact. Said Jahar Sengupta, IEL chairman: "The agreement will instil confidence in weak managements. They are equally responsible for the chaotic

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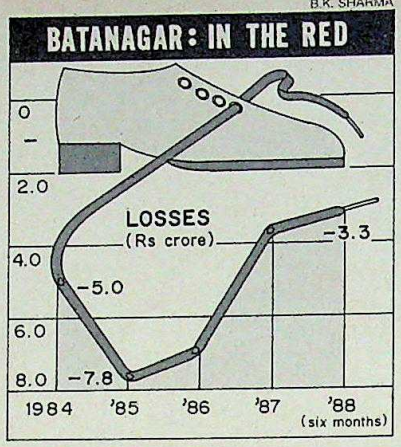
industrial relations in the state." Added R. Maheswari, Texmaco president: "Both parties have been pragmatic. Had the union not accepted the proposals, Batanagar might have met the fate of Metal Box and Guest Keen Williams."

That argument is picked up by Bata's Lamba. He says that the unit has been losing money because the workforce was bloated and productivity was low. Over the last four-and-a-half years alone, it has piled up total losses of almost Rs 27 crore (*see chart*). "Batanagar had become unmanageable and unviable. We have to minimise the high cost to survive. How long could we have tolerated the cash drain?" asks Lamba.

Labour circles do not buy the argument. They accuse Bata of wanting to cut production capacity at Batanagar and of "trading" or farming out work to other manufacturers. Lamba denies this, saying: "I want to make Batanagar our prime unit once again. We'll be investing anything to the tune of Rs 5 crore in the immediate future for producing state-of-the-art shoes. No one should also object to our trading. That is in conformity with the Government's policy of encouraging the small sector."

B.K. SHARMA



Of the company's four factories in the country, Batanagar is the only losing unit. Before the lock-out, it accounted for 70 per cent of the company's total sales, but the management brought the figure down to 35 per cent by jacking up production at the other units. Still, shoe sales in Calcutta at least were hit by labour picketing at Bata shops. While the management is confident that Bata's sales this year will not drop, that remains to be seen. What is clear is that the shoe company has done what other corporations in West Bengal could not—bring labour to heel.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

IDEAL JAWA

In a Coma

AFTER roaring in the fast track for nearly 25 years, Ideal Jawa (India) has puttered to a halt.

Citing financial constraints, the Mysore-based company recently stopped production and applied to the Government for permission to lay off half its 2,000-strong workforce. Said Raian Irani, a major shareholder and son of the late company head Farrokh Irani: "If our retrenchment plan goes through, we can bounce back."

The 28-year-old company's 250 cc Jawa motorcycle (renamed Yezdi after a 15-year run) was a classic till sportier, more fuel-efficient vehicles backed by Japanese technology raced past it to the top of the popularity charts. The company's share of the motorcycle market fell from 28.8 per cent in 1981 to a meagre 5.04 per cent in 1987. Last July, just 387 motorcycles rolled out of its plant. With production plummeting, manufacturing costs soared: Rs 15,672, against the selling price of Rs 10,600 (according to the company's report to the labour commissioner). The wage bills alone came to 57 per cent of the cost.

The Iranis, who own Ideal Jawa, now insist that labour has to be shed before the company can rev up again. As retirement benefits, it has offered workers Rs 1,750 for every year served. The unions, however, want Rs 5,000 for every year served and Rs 2,000 for every remaining year.

With the matter yet to be resolved, the spotlight has now swung to the fate of the company. Inevitably, angry workers charge the management with shutting its eyes to competition. Tehemtem Irani, the chief executive officer (production) and a major shareholder, however, replies that it did try to tie up with the Japanese. But they were only interested in big companies like Escorts and Bajaj.

A more serious—and apparently valid—charge is that the management failed to expand its dealership network, depending on an old circle of 200-odd dealers. Worse, it neglected advertising. Ideal Jawa spent only Rs 7 lakh for advertising in 1986, under half per cent of its annual turnover of Rs 20 crore. Says P. Parthasarathy, director (operations) of Efficient Publicities which handles the Ideal Jawa account: "They displayed an astonishing lack of faith in advertising."

The company, however, now hopes to get back on to the road with a new 175 cc motorcycle that it has already tested and had planned to put into the market next year. This, the Iranis claim, gives a mileage of 52 to 55 km per litre as against the 250 cc Yezdi Classic's meagre 30 km. Since 90 per cent of the new motorcycle's components will be the same as the Yezdi's, servicing and spare parts will not be a problem. But before that can happen, Ideal Jawa will have to strike a deal with its unions.

And if there's a moral in all this, it's clear: companies that cannot keep up with the times go bust.

—CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA

Yezdi Classic: gas guzzler

MUSHTAQ AHMED

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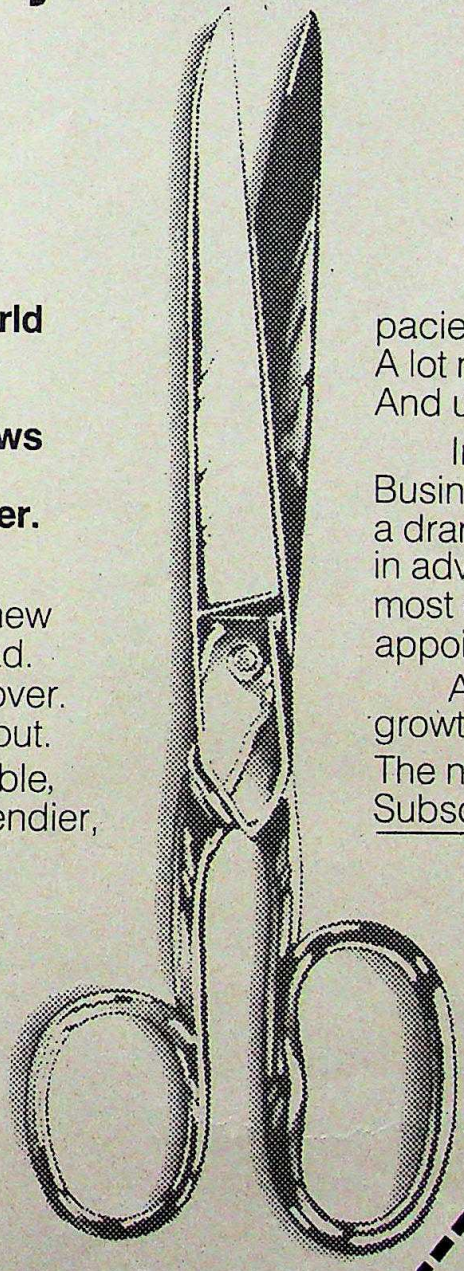

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CREDIT CARDS

New Entrants

Nationalised banks join fray

FIRST, there was one. Then, three. Now there are hordes of them. Indeed, the country's public sector banks are handing out credit cards like never before. Some are riding piggyback on international cards like Mastercard and Visa, while others are floating subsidiary companies to handle business. Moreover, at least one foreign bank will launch a card while another is surveying market prospects.

The result of this ferment is that a small market that saw just three cards—issued by the state-owned Central Bank of India and Andhra Bank, and the privately owned Diners Club of India—a few years ago, will soon be choc-a-bloc with over 15 cards. Says P. Aggarwal, joint managing director of Diners Club: "The market is expanding and we are looking forward to competition."

The bank stampede was triggered off more than a year ago when the State Bank of India, Canara Bank and Bank of Baroda launched cards. Since then, several smaller nationalised banks have tied up with the early entrants to get a firm foothold. For instance, Vysya Bank and United Bank have introduced credit cards in affiliation with Central Bank. Three others may follow suit.

The market will get even more crowded. State Bank is in the process of permitting its six associate banks to issue cards. And for the first time ever, the Government has permitted a foreign bank to enter the domestic market: Grindlays Bank will launch a card early next year. Obviously, other foreign banks will line up before the Government for permission to float their own cards. American Express—known for its international credit card—is already surveying business prospects here.

What's more, government-owned banks are consolidating their position in the market. Bank of India has received official permission to launch a card subsidiary. Four other banks will invest in its equity. Central Bank too may set up a subsidiary. Voicing a common sentiment, Canara Bank's card division General Manager Dinesh Nayak says: "We have exceeded our targets in the first year. The trend is encouraging."

Just how encouraging it is, or even the size of the market for that matter, is difficult to determine in an industry where billings are a closely-guarded secret. Still, sources reckon that Diners Club with its 70,000 members notched up billings of Rs 75 crore last year, followed by Central Bank (40,000 members) with around Rs 50 crore. Third was Andhra Bank (40,000 members) with billings of about Rs 42 crore.

Such numbers suggest a business that easily tops Rs 160 crore. But the figures are deceptive. Explains Sanjiv Malhotra, operations manager at Bombay's Oberoi Towers which accepts credit cards: "Eighty per cent of our credit card-related revenue comes from foreigners who stay at the hotel. The domestic base is narrow." Minus international transactions, the size of the Indian credit card market is placed at no more than Rs 60 crore. The country's total credit card membership tally is just 1.5 lakh—chickenfeed considering that around six million people pay taxes.

And that's the irony. Everyone's jumping into a tiny market—and not a few are getting bruised. With 15 nationalised banks fiercely battling it out for a share of the action, establishments that accept credit cards are having a field day. They've ruthlessly driven down the commissions they pay banks for throwing business their way. Says the manager of a leading department store in Bombay: "Earlier, 4 to 6 per cent commissions were the norm. Today, if the banks manage to get 3 per cent, they are lucky." Not surprisingly, only a handful of bank credit card divisions are breaking even, let alone emerging with black ink on their ledgers.

One reason is that few state-owned banks have a clear marketing strategy. Private card companies like Diners Club aggressively seek business. This is not the case with the nationalised banks. State Bank General Manager Naresh Muranjan makes an additional point: "Here, people still prefer to pay in cash." Convincing grocers and chemists to accept cards has been a Herculean task.

What then explains the collective rush into an unremunerative business? Most banks are eager to diversify from their traditional operations, and believe that they will one day strike paydirt, even if the pickings are lean right now. "Credit cards and automatic teller machines are the sunrise activities of Indian banking," insists Suren Khirdwadkar, vice-president of Citibank's consumer services group. "The long term prospects are good." Adds Tushar Chopra, Bank of America's vice-president in Bombay for individual banking: "The growing middle class and the booming consumer goods markets are indicators that credit cards have a huge potential."

Still, wisdom has dawned on the public sector banks. In a bid to pool resources, they've submitted several proposals to the Finance Ministry. One is to merge the credit card, traveller and gift cheques and automatic teller machine business of all the state-owned banks. A new company with a large share capital could carry clout in the market. Whether all the banks will welcome the loss of identity of their separate cards is another matter. Still, if their business is merged, a leaner and more mature business could finally be on the cards.

—S.N. VASUKI

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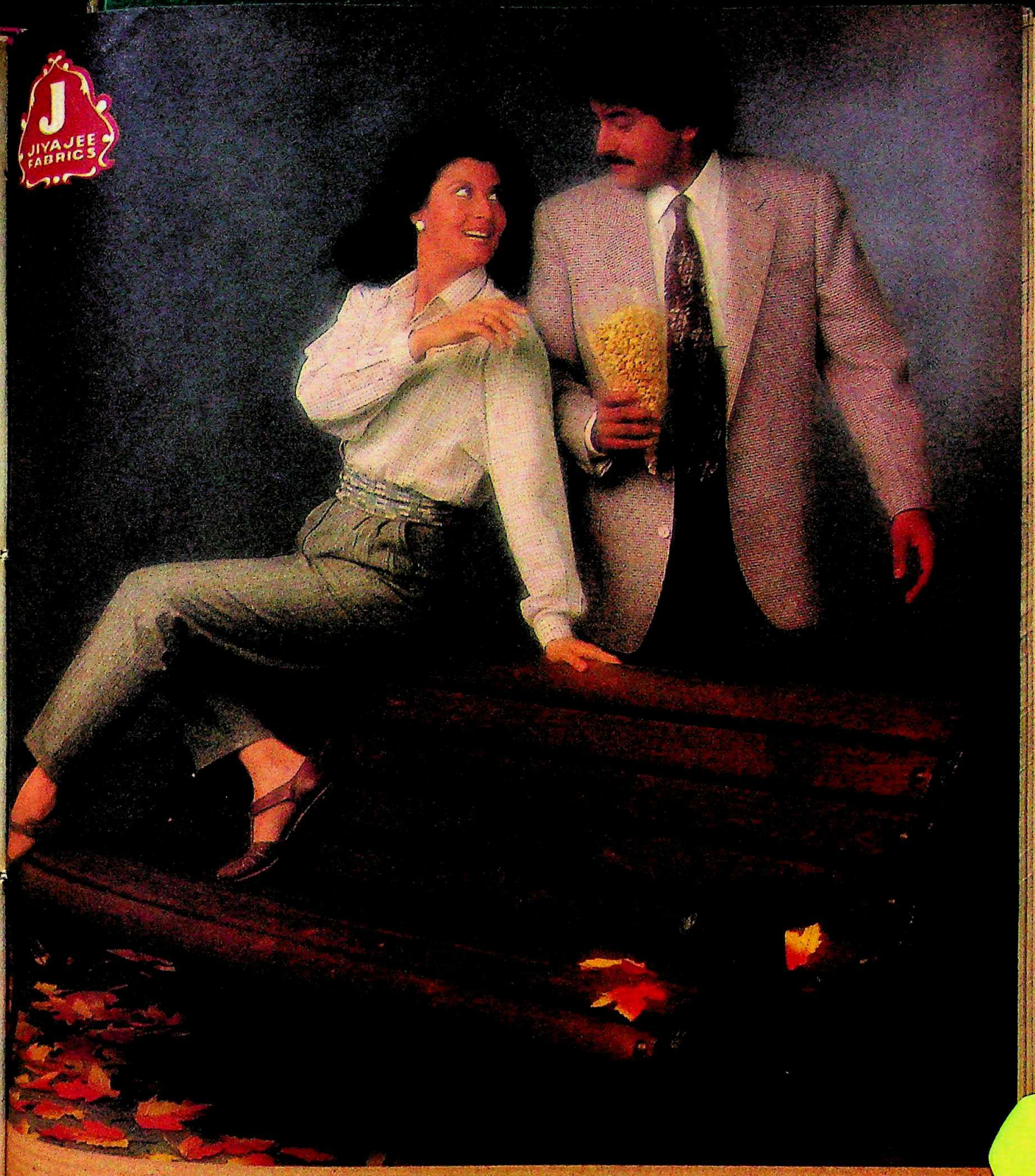

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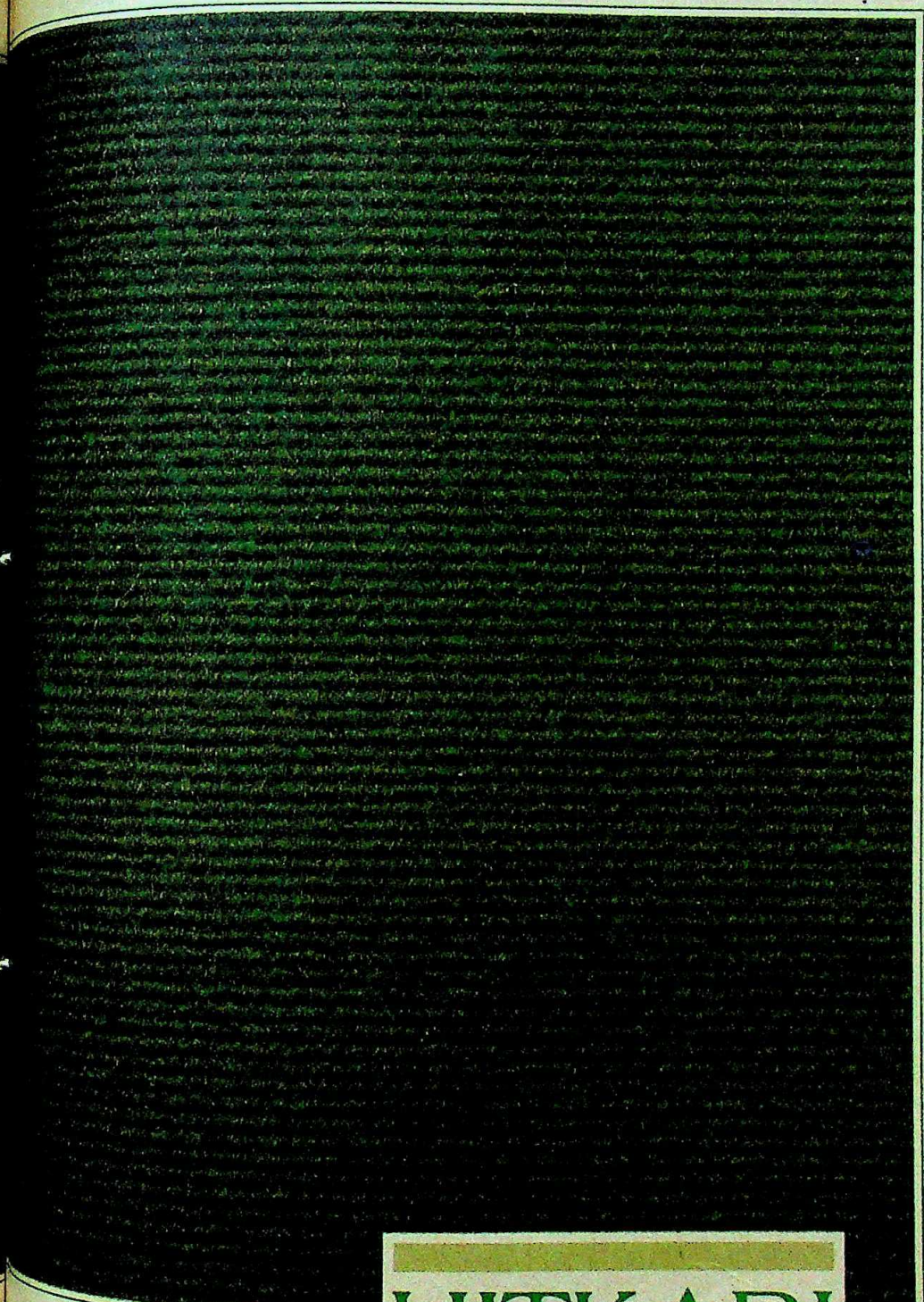

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OILSEEDS

Glut Gloom

Groundnut oil prices crash

AFTER three rainless years, Saurashtra, the groundnut bowl of India, is suffering from an embarrassment of riches. Farmers, impoverished by the recurring drought, are hardly overjoyed about their bumper harvest. With stockyards in the major purchasing centres full, prices have dramatically crashed and a buyer's market has emerged.

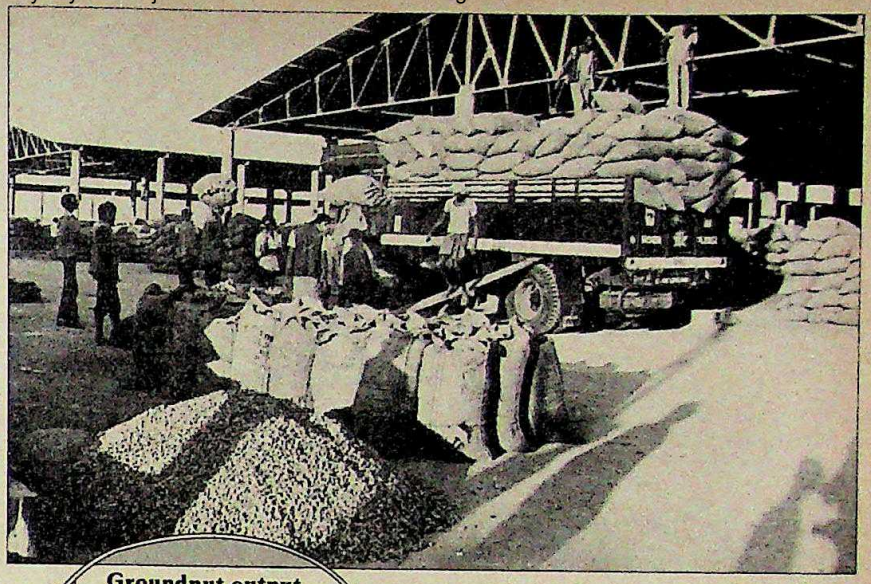
A 15-kg oil tin which sold for over Rs 400 last July, now costs just Rs 260. Groundnut oilseeds (in pods) which cost as much as Rs 200 per 20 kg last year, are now selling for Rs 110. Says a dismayed oil miller: "It's the lowest in the last four to five years."

In this extraordinary situation, local newspaper advertisements exhort farmers not to rush with their stock to the wholesale markets. The reason: Saurashtra's four major groundnut buying centres—Rajkot, Junagadh, Dhoraji and Upleta—are overflowing.

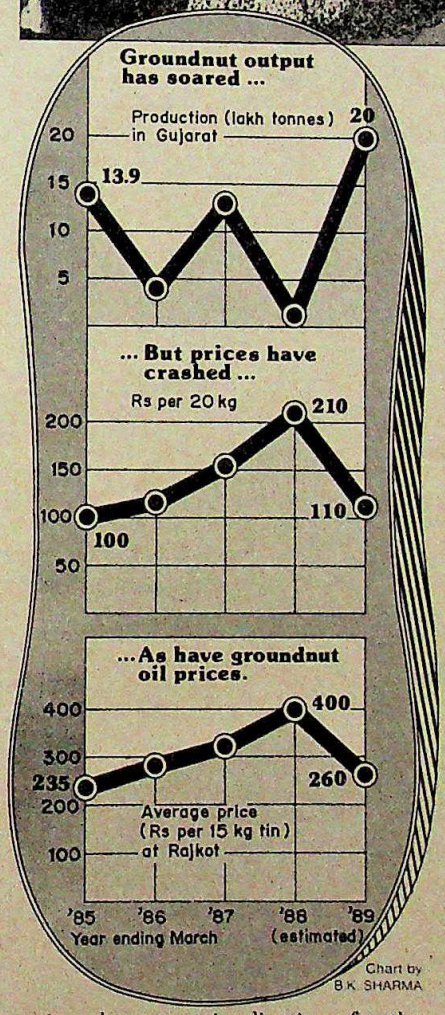
With a groundnut crop worth over Rs 1,000 crore waiting to be lifted, the position is alarming. Says farmer Mulji Patel: "The situation is really grave. Just one shower can destroy a crop worth hundreds of crores of rupees lying out in the open." Even if both official farm product procurement agencies, the Gujarat Cooperative Growers Federation (GROFED) and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED), step in on an all-out emergency basis, they can't buy more than Rs 200 crore worth of groundnut. Says Vaghji Patel, a medium-scale farmer of Junagadh: "We're doomed. The Government should do something about it."

The Gujarat Government is worried, but isn't doing too much. All it has done is to request the Centre and NAFED to buy as much stock as possible. Says Agriculture Minister Mahant Vijaydasji: "We fear prices will crash further. And if ryots face such marketing problems any longer, they'll be discouraged from going in for groundnut cultivation in future."

The concern is echoed in New Delhi. "That's what I'm worried about," admits P.V. Shenoi, the Agriculture Ministry special secretary who heads the Centre's technology mission on oilseeds. With prices dropping, farmers will have no incentive to grow the crop. This has serious long-term implications for the country's balance of payments position.



Groundnut being transported to Rajkot



With edible oils production inadequate, the country imported oils worth Rs 1,061 crore last year. Imports will be down this year, but if production fails to take off next year, the import bill could burgeon again.

This comes at a time when, in a bid to trim the import bill and step up domestic production, the Government has been slowly increasing edible oil prices. Just how crucial groundnut is in this game plan is evident from the fact that it accounts for 55 per cent of the country's oilseeds output.

This year, Gujarat has produced an 18-year high of about 20 lakh tonnes of unshelled groundnut (Saurashtra accounts for over 80 per cent of the production). The record crop is the result of adequate rainfall over a period of time—groundnut needs three to four showers. Also, insects have exacted minimal toll on the crop this season and, because of successful extension work, some farmers have produced an unusually high 2.07 tonnes per hectare of land.

Yet it's the farmer who'll wind up paying for his remarkable performance. As National Dairy Development Board Chairman V. Kurien said wryly: "Every time the farmer produces more, he gets a kick in his belly." The farmer's capital is locked up in his crop—and he can't hawk it for a profit. "Farmers may even resort to distress sale of their groundnut crop," warns V. Patel, a senior scientist at the Junagadh zone of the Gujarat Agriculture University.

Groundnut oil today costs less than most other edible oils—cottonseed, mustard, til and sunflower oils. And with the soyabean crop in Madhya Pradesh being good this year, groundnut oil prices could drop even more. Sadly, all this need never have happened at all. Farmers, oil millers, traders and even government officials agree that official lethargy is to blame. Says Maganbhai

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Patel, an oil miller from Dhoraji: "In the past, the Government has imported oil even when groundnut harvesting was on. This is due to the absence of a clear-cut policy. What is needed is a definite policy based on advance reports before the onset of the harvesting season."

Sources in GROFED and the state Agriculture Department say that they had advised the Centre on the steps to be taken to stabilise the groundnut market. But the Government responded with inexcusable inaction. Says Chandubhai Kothari, a former president of the Solvent Extractors Association of India and chief spokesman for the edible oil industry for many years: "It's crystal clear that the official policy is governed by ad hocism."

A senior GROFED official has recommended that, to salvage the situation, the so-called support price the Government pays groundnut growers should be raised from Rs 430 per quintal to Rs 600. The current price of Rs 430 barely covers the farmer's production costs. If oil is to be provided to consumers at reasonable rates, he says, the Government should formulate a policy of purchasing the produce during harvest season, storing it, and releasing it just as prices start to rise.

THE Centre has, however, modified its oilseeds policy. While it has rejected the demand to hike the support price to Rs 600, it has informally indicated its willingness to pay more than Rs 430. New Delhi has also agreed to set up a buffer stock, and will assign the task to an existing agency. Oilseeds mission director Shenoi also insists that the Government is committed to buying oilseeds. "NAFED has been given Rs 120 crore for all crops, as a first instalment," says he. "Money is no constraint." Even so, all this may come too late to help the farmer.

The sunny side of the gloomy picture is that the bumper crop will cut imports by more than half this year. The technology mission has recommended that imports be cut from 18.5 lakh tonnes in the oil year ending last month, to 8 lakh tonnes. There may be some good news for the housewife too—in the short run. Retail groundnut oil prices will probably be lower. Says a spokesman of Lipton India, which turns out refined groundnut oil: "It is our general practice to cut prices when the price of raw oil goes down. In the last 12 weeks, we've reduced prices three times."

The general speculation is that if the Government's hitherto creaky machinery receives the necessary oil and if more oil mills begin operation, the edible groundnut oil price in the coming months will be in the region of Rs 280 to Rs 320 for a 15-kg tin, down from more than Rs 400 a few months ago.

The hapless farmers are in no mood for excuses. They are sore that the Government's lack of foresight has made a mockery of their toil and their persistent refusal to give in to the whims of the weather. Now they want their pound of flesh. And if they don't get it, they could display their ire where it counts the most—at the hustings.

—UDAY MAHURKAR with bureau reports

HERBERTSONS

Unique Deal

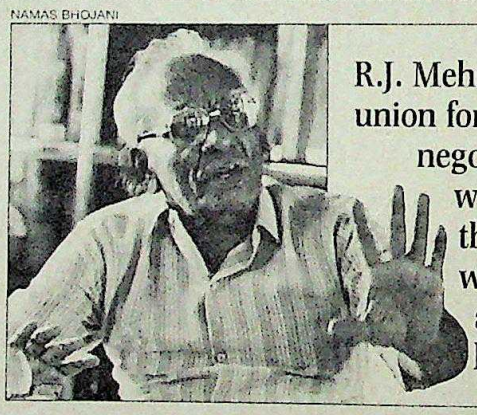
EVER heard of a company granting its workers paid honeymoon leave? Or paid paternity leave?

No, the company doesn't operate in Europe or the US, but in Bombay. A ketchup and sauces unit of Herbertsons offers its 280 factory and head office workers all this and more.

Recently, the unit's management signed a startling wage agreement with its union, led by trade unionist R.J. Mehta. Apart from a flat monthly wage increase per worker of Rs 400, the agreement provides for:

- A Rs-300 hill-station allowance, in addition to a varying annual leave travel allowance. "A hill-station is the ideal place for a holiday, and workers need an incentive to get there," says Mehta quite seriously.
- A week's fully paid honeymoon leave, available once—just in case workers decide that it pays to marry more than once.
- A month's abortion leave with full pay for the unit's 70 women employees.
- A week's paid paternity leave for workers whose wives are visited by the stork. This clause was introduced at the insistence of Chand Bibi, union general secretary, who insists that men should be more responsible about their families. However, the allowance is open only to workers who don't have more than two children. "We have to make a contribution to family planning after all," says Mehta.
- A Rs-50 monthly newspaper purchase allowance to inculcate the reading habit among workers.

NAMAS BHOJANI



R.J. Mehta, head of the trade union for the last 19 years, negotiated the novel wage agreement with the mangement, which includes allowances like honeymoon leave.

The latest pact is the outcome of 14 months of talks between Mehta, who's led the union for the last 19 years, and Senior Vice-President D.R. Pinge, who negotiated for the management. "The agreement," says a company spokesman enthusiastically, "is a great motivating factor. Workers will take the initiative to work harder."

Companies have granted zany allowances in the past (example: 45 days' paid leave for women employees of Synthetics and Chemicals who have miscarriages). But it certainly is the only agreement of its kind in the United Breweries group, of which Herbertsons is a subsidiary. The agreement will jack up the Bombay unit's Rs 18-lakh wage bill by around Rs 3 lakh, but the management reckons that it's got a good deal because one-time annual payments are involved.

P.S.: R.J. Mehta maintains an excellent terrace garden at his office. After every wage agreement, he sends a rose plant to the senior manager he negotiated with. Late last fortnight, Pinge was awaiting his plant.

—S.N. VASUKI

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Singapore Girl

Across five continents you're a great way to fly

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Bold, sporty and fashionable. The statement of rich and refined Vimal suitings.

V I M A L ' S □ W I N T E R □ S T A T E M

A) The tasteful diamond black tuxedo in vicuna weave is worn over a wing collared shirt. With multiple pleated front. Trousers have two pleats and cross pockets. Patent leather shoes complete the look.

B) For a brisk, confident lounge suit in midnight blue. Lapels are single breasted notched. Pockets have flaps. No slits at the back. Trousers are double pleated.

C) A unique jerkin that looks a cross between a coat and a sports jacket. Two large box pleated pockets. A thick waist band that ends three inches below the waist. Dashing contemporary style.

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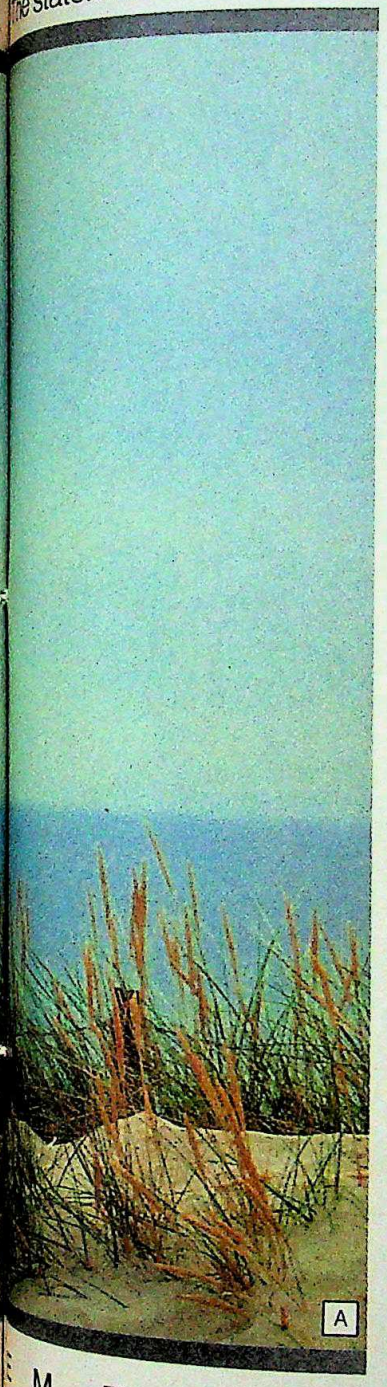
uitings.

The statement of Ravi Shastri.



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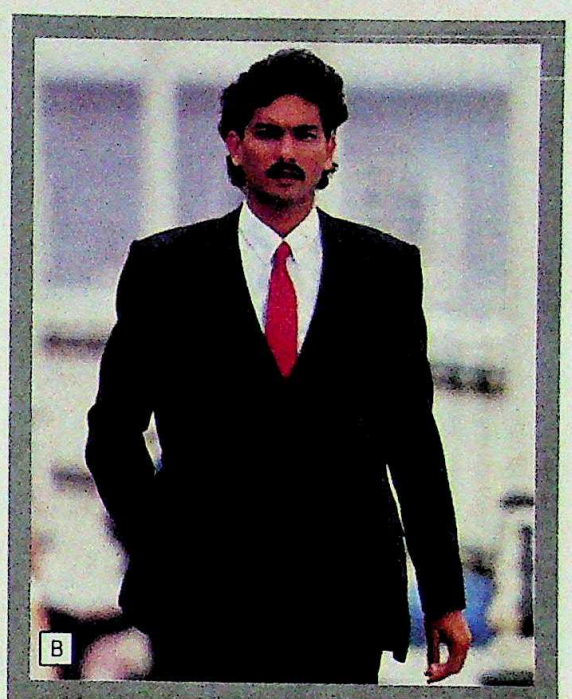

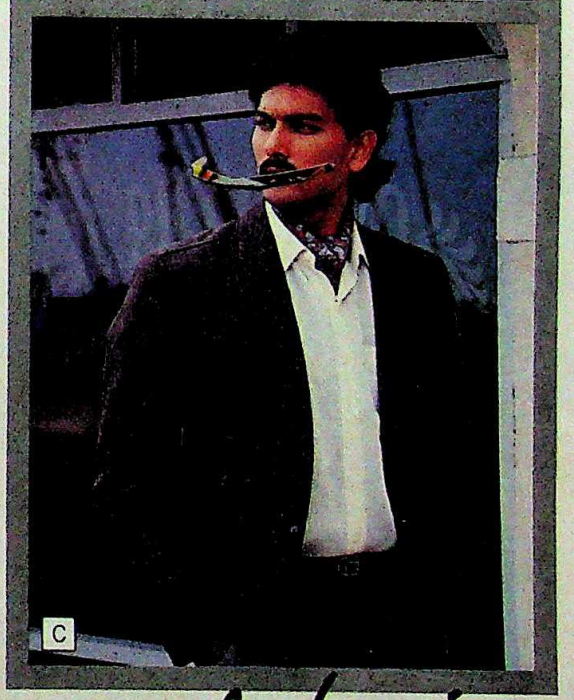

The looks of a winner

VIMAL
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WOOLLEN & POLYRICH SUITINGS

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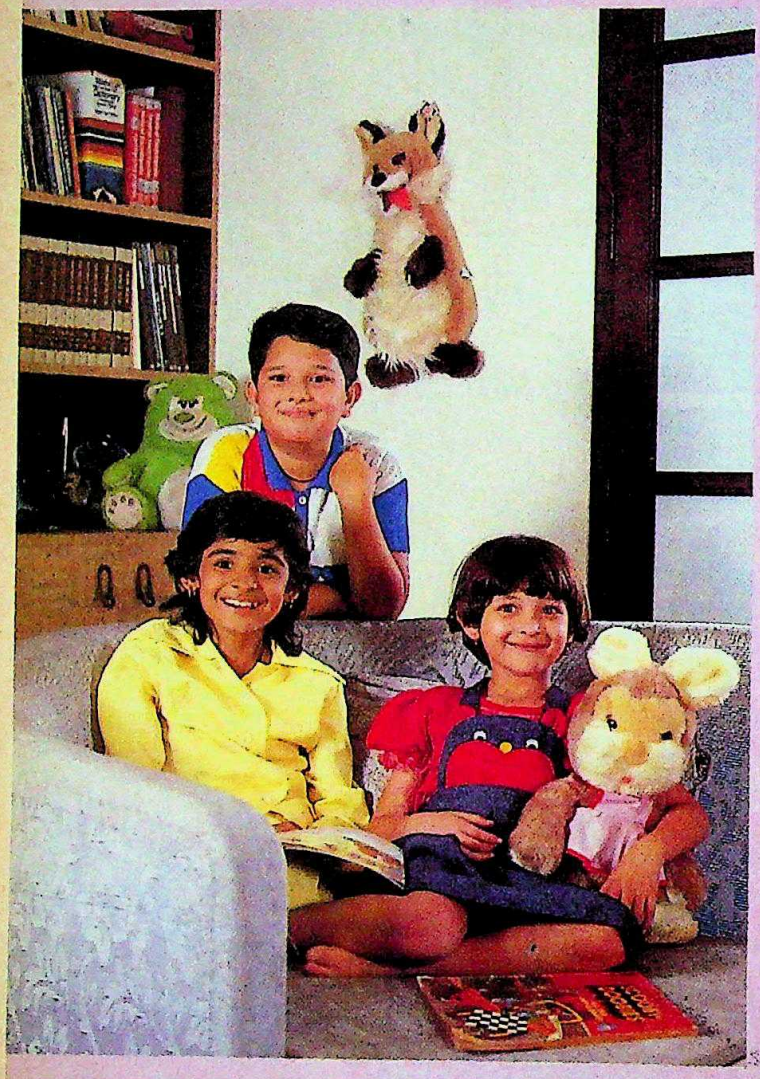
In your concern for their happiness



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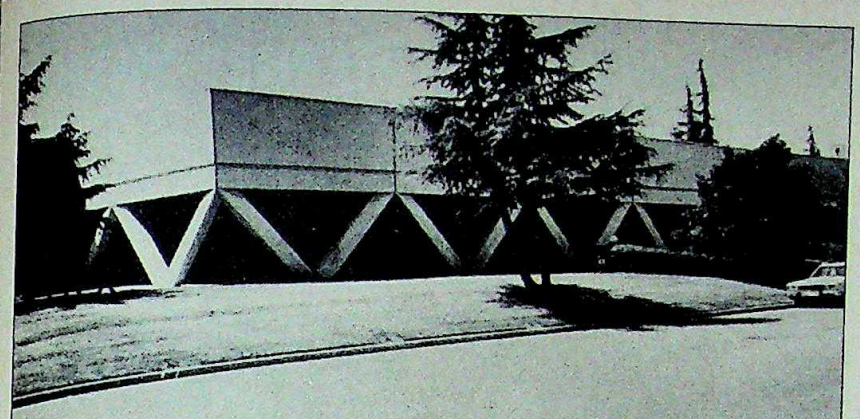


HCL

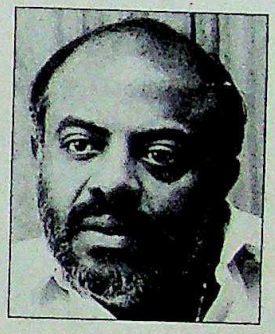
Taking on Goliath

WHO'S afraid of IBM? David is all set to take on Goliath, on home ground. Not with sling-shot technology either. State-of-the-art computers are what the Noida-based HCL Limited is going to design, build, and sell in the home and heart of the microchip, the USA. HCL America, a wholly-owned subsidiary of HCL has a plant just down the road from IBM and Unisys in California's Silicon Valley. And it is all set to turn out its first 25 pieces this fortnight.

Indian multinationals are not new. The Tatas, Birlas and Oberois are among the host of Indian companies with units abroad. Even computer wares have been exported before. But this is the first time such sophisticated electronic hardware is to be exported. And unlike earlier Indian foreign ventures, which have often suffered an inferiority complex, this one is thrusting straight into the toughest market-place. "It's an outstanding achievement...a foothold in a very competitive field," says O.P. Mehra, president of the Manufacturers Association of Information Technology.

In a sense, it is a test project for Indian industry. As HCL Chairman Shiv Nadar says: "Its working out or not will have implications far beyond HCL." The company represents the ascendancy of a dynamic new breed of entrepreneur. Begun by six young former DCM executives with a seed capital of Rs 1.75 lakh in 1975, HCL started out to make pocket calculators. After a good start, the company took a bad patch in 1982-84, then rallied strongly. Plans for HCL America began to take shape in 1986, and the parent this year was the top computer company in the country with a turnover topping Rs 100 crore.

Its trump card now is its new Magnum multiprocessor unit, which Nadar describes as "a world class international product". It is to be released simultaneously in India and the US. The Magnum seeks to beat the basic problem of computer manufacture—the fact that progressively more powerful chips hit the market every few months, outpacing comparatively recent products. It multiplies the chip's power by using six—possibly more later—chips in tandem. As more sophisticated chips hit the market, the company's engineers get cracking, developing more complex multi-processor systems in time to beat the next advances. Only one other company in the world—Sequint—has succeeded before. That is, achieved the efficiency of a mini-supercomputer at a price far below anything previously available.



HCL chief Shiv Nadar: new horizons

The company's great advantage over US competitors is the relative cheapness of its research and development. Its team of about 250 engineers is as big as the manpower many a $ 10 billion US company can deploy on the same research. While the cost of hiring engineers is much lower here, they are quite as good as anywhere, and more easily available. "That's our basic advantage," says Nadar. So, HCL's research and development will remain firmly rooted in India while manufacture spreads across the globe.

Silicon Valley office: big league

Sensibly, the company is going step by step in the US. The Magnum will be sold through a well-established US company, which has given HCL an initial $ 16 million (Rs 24 crore) "test order". The company, "one of the lesser-known ones in the *Fortune* 500", will market the mini-super computer under its own label. HCL is negotiating with other such US-based vendors and "talks are at a pretty hot stage with three or four of them," says Sumit Bhattacharya, HCL's manager for market planning and development. The machine's outer frame would be tailored to the needs of each customer to market.

That's only for a start. Within five years, the company hopes to market its wares, including components and software, directly in the US. Once it establishes itself in that toughest of markets, it should be a cakewalk across the Atlantic to the European market—possibly by 1990. And, who knows, even Japan is not beyond the ambitions of this 12-year-young group of dynamic engineers. Already, "we're looking at it", says Bhattacharya brightly. Singapore-based HCL subsidiary, Far East Electronics, already caters to South-east Asia.

So far, the investment in HCL America is $ 5 million (Rs 7.5 crore), a far larger amount of hard currency than the Reserve Bank has generally been willing to part with in the past. Nadar notes "a very refreshing acceptance that some organisation is even trying it". Much more difficult than getting Indian clearances was convincing Americans that this little Indian company had a good product and could be depended on. Half the battle was won, though, when HCL got top-slot consultants McKenzie & Co to do a survey for them earlier this year. McKenzie not only helped HCL get to know the US market, it also showed the local market "that we were not just a bunch of nuts, that we were deadly serious", as Bhattacharya puts it.

Right now, these tough nuts are deadly serious about their deadline commitments. They know they have to fight an entrenched image of Indian inefficiency. If any company can dispel that image, HCL has amply shown that it can.

—DAVID DEVADAS

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SOFT DRINKS

The New Fizz

Coca-Cola applies for entry

THE world's biggest commercial war is threatening to open a new front in India. The ink had barely dried on the Government's controversial clearance for Pepsi-Cola's entry into the country when arch-rival Coca-Cola popped in an application last fortnight. Obviously, both the giant soft drink multinationals yearn for a slice of the Rs 600-crore market, though indigenous industry has flourished here in the last 11 years.

While Pepsi got in through a tortuous route, Coca-Cola has sought a unit at the Noida Export Processing Zone.

Predictably, these companies are not pleased. "We were the only country in the world that had no foreign soft drinks. From a status of total self-reliance, we will be dominated by multinationals," says soft drinks magnate Ramesh Chauhan of Parle. Even as the Bangalore-based McDowell's began dismantling its carbonated beverages division (it may now hawk the concentrate, and leave the marketing to bottlers), Chauhan joined other soft drinks manufacturers for a pow-wow in Hyderabad.

Pepsi got in through the side door, with a 40 per cent share in a joint venture with Voltas and Punjab-Agro for processing potato and grain into chips and for agricultural research—and, of course, to make the soft drink. Not to be outdone, Coca-Cola decided to establish its presence here. So it found some loose boards in the back door to the Indian market. It has proposed a production unit for ingredients of its concentrate at the Noida Export Processing Zone (EPZ) near Delhi.

Primarily meant for Indian exporters, the Government has gradually relaxed the EPZ rules by permitting wholly foreign-owned companies to set up units, and allowing 25 per cent of production in these units to be sold in the domestic market.

Coca-Cola executives make no bones about the fact that they want to take advantage of this provision to get a foothold in India. The export will consist of the Coca-Cola Corporation selling its product to itself—"as part of our global manufacturing network," as Stuart Eastwood, Coca-Cola's director of market development (Africa, Middle East and South Asia) puts it.

The EPZ provision that units can be wholly foreign-owned and can repatriate their entire profits, fits with the company's insistence that its secret 7X formula can only be manufactured by a wholly-owned subsidiary. It had preferred to leave India in 1977 after dominating it for 27 years, rather than agree to manufacturing the concentrate in collaboration with an Indian company.

Coca-Cola plans to invest around $2 million (Rs 3 crore) in the concentrate plant at Noida. About half the raw material is to be purchased locally and the value added will be about 86 per cent. All this conforms with the requirements of the EPZs, and the project's proponents emphasise that it needs no special concessions. Yet, the decision will be necessarily political since the proposal takes advantage of export promotion incentives to enter the domestic market. "It could open the floodgates for other foreign companies," observes an official.

If approved, Coca-Cola will be marketed jointly with an Indian company. At the moment, Godrej is the frontrunner for a tie-up. A.B. Godrej, Godrej Soaps's managing director, says that "if we clinch the deal, the project will be implemented through Noble Soya" (in which the promoters of Great Eastern Shipping also have a stake). For the moment, Coca-Cola is looking for a spot in the market rather than size and executives aver that it will take no more than a 10 per cent slice. However, if both the giants enter together, it will most likely be a no holds barred war.

—DAVID DEVADAS

ENNORE FOUNDRIES

Strange Switch

Former boss leads labourers

CHENNAGIRI Subbasetty Satyanarayana Setty, 65, is the new president of the Ennore Foundries Employees Union. So what's new? Just his startling past: Setty was the company's managing director for eight years.

Last fortnight, Setty trounced veteran trade union leader R. Kuchelar by over 1,000 votes to take over as head of the 1,700-member union at Ennore Foundries, the Ashok Leyland castings enterprise. Responding to the development, the Rs 40-crore company's Managing Director D. Vasudeva Rao said non-committally: "A certain amount of professionalism is to be expected now."

Setty talks of bringing management techniques to bear on his job, but has still to spell these out. Nevertheless, in his new avatar as union boss, Setty is bound to prove an embarrassment to the management. As Setty notes wryly: "Each one of them worked under me and I know how to handle them."

The former managing director has presented the management with a charter of demands, including a job for one member of a retiring employee's family. Still, he has no illusions that the going will be easy. Says Setty: "We are going to meet with a lot of resistance from the top management."

Setty (left) being greeted: unique role

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MACL

Modi Alkalies & Chemicals Ltd.

Regd. Office : SP-460, Matsya Industrial Area, Alwar (Raj.)
Head Office : 18-Community Centre, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110065

Shri K.K. Modi

Speech of Shri K.K. Modi, Chairman, Modi Alkalies & Chemicals Ltd. delivered At 9th Annual General Meeting held on 29th Oct., 1988

Ladies & Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I welcome you all to the 9th Annual General Meeting of the Company.

The year 1987-88 has been a difficult one for India on the economic front. The overall state of the economy was under unprecedented stress because of the countrywide drought. It is, however, heartening to note that the shortfall of the agricultural sector has been made up by the growth in the service and industrial sectors leading to a growth of 1-2% in the Gross National Product. Without going over board with the achievements of the Indian Government in drought management and steering the national economy, I would like to acknowledge the sensitivity of the Government of India in closely monitoring the economy through carefully designed fiscal policies. The Government's initiative in checking the non-plan expenditure has helped in containing the inflationary trends.

The importance of exports for the growth of Indian economy needs no emphasis. We are conscious of the industry's responsibility in contributing to the increase of exports for long range benefits to us and the Indian economy. It was on this aspect that we had applied for the increase in licenced capacity of the Caustic Soda Plant. The sales made by Caustic Soda Industry to the domestic units, who were otherwise importing these products should be eligible for benefits of deemed exports. This will go a long way in promoting the interest of the industry and help in saving the valuable foreign exchange.

Your Company is amongst the first to have started exporting Caustic Soda. On the export front, the Company has been able to show an increase of 48% by exporting goods worth Rs. 123 lacs during the year as against Rs. 83 lacs in last year.

Your Company has been allowed to increase its licenced capacity of Caustic Soda from 33,000 TPA to 41,250 TPA under Automatic Growth Scheme. In order to optimise overall capacity, an application for the financial assistance for putting up balancing equipments is pending with the Financial Institutions. This increase in overall capacity will help us to give further push to export efforts.

Turning to our own performance, the Annual Report of the Board of Directors together with audited accounts for the year ended 30th April, 1988 have already

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been circulated to you and with your permission, I take them as read.

Your Company has been able to achieve slightly better results in the financial year 1987-88 despite continued depressed conditions in the industry and increased power-cuts in the State of Rajasthan. The turnover of the Company during the year has been Rs. 2364 lacs as against Rs. 2335 lacs during the previous year. The profit after interest and depreciation for the year has been Rs. 87 lacs as against Rs. 63 lacs in the last year. The Company has achieved utilisation of 83% of the installed capacity as against 67% average of the whole industry during the year under review.

The Company has achieved capacity utilisation of 109% of installed capacity during the period May —September, 1988 as against the industry average of 72%. During this period, the turnover of the Company has been Rs. 1297 lacs as against Rs. 883 lacs achieved during the corresponding period of 1987-88 showing an increase of 46%. In the same period, the Company has earned cash profit Rs. 220 lacs as against Rs. 83 lacs registering an increase of 165%. Consequently based on the current year's performance from May 1988 onwards, the profitability of the Company is expected to increase significantly during 1988-89.

The overall outlook in the industry since May, 1988 is better because of increased demand and indigenous off-take of Caustic Soda by big NALCO Project. Further there is good scope for export of Caustic Soda for which the Alkali Manufacturers' Association has made representation to the Government of India for fixing up cash compensatory support on export of Caustic Soda. This will substantially improve the performance of the Company.

Your Company has also got Letters of Intent for the manufacture of various down-stream products viz. Activated Earth, Aluminium Chloride, Sodium Hypochlorite, Monochloro Acetic Acid & Tri Penta Chlorophenols. An application for 6,000 TPA Activated Earth Plant is under consideration with Financial Institutions based on indigenous technology developed by I.I.T.

Your company is continuing to give top priority and utmost importance to the maintenance of the desired safety standards and pollution control measures at the Plant. For this purpose, from time to time, both in-house and outside expert agencies' views are taken into account.

Your Company has made concerted efforts in developing chlorine based ancillary units with the dual objective of generating more employment and sharing the technical expertise for greater economic growth of the region. In this regard, you would be happy to know that as many as 26 such new units have developed around the factory which will further ensure market for our products.

While concluding, I would like to record my thanks to all my colleagues on the Board for their invaluable counsel and guidance. I am also grateful to the Rajasthan Government, All India Financial Institutions, Commercial Banks and outside agencies for their continued support and invaluable assistance to the Company. My thanks are also due to our dealers and customers and it will be our endeavour to provide them with best quality products and services. I also record my sincere thanks to all the levels of staff for taking full interest and dedication in the growth of the Company.

Thanking you and wishing you a very "HAPPY DIWALI"

Note : This does not purport to be the part of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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A metallurgical engineer, Setty headed Ennore Foundries, located on the outskirts of Madras, between 1971 and 1979. During his tenure, he says he established a rapport with labour because he spent more time on the shop floor than in his cabin. Differences with the board finally forced him to quit.

The next nine years were spent as a private management consultant. But fate intervened. For the first time in 23 years, N. Theyagarajan, an employee, pipped a professional trade unionist to the union presidentship. When elections came round this year, Theyagarajan began hunting for a successor who could handle the union's myriad problems.

Labour viewed Setty's tenure as company head as a golden era, and Theyagarajan arrived at Setty's doorstep. "I thought over the matter for two days, then decided to go ahead since the workers were expressing such faith in me," says Setty. The rest is history.

Setty comes back at a time when good labour relations are crucial for Ennore Foundries. The Hindujas and Iveco, the Fiat subsidiary, have ambitious plans for the profitable company they took over eight months ago. These include a Rs 10-crore plan to replace a 20-year-old plant and entering the export market. Plainly, these plans will have to take a fresh imponderable into account—the return of an old managing director in a unique role.

—LALITHA DILEEP

MULTINATIONALS

Foreign Faces

Indian heads being replaced

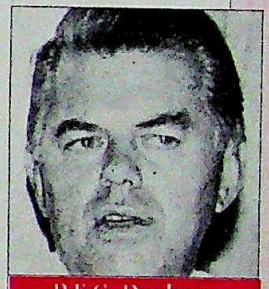
FOR almost three decades, match company Wimco Ltd had an Indian at its head: first Akbar Hydari, and then Kamaljit Singh. Wimco's parent company, the Swedish Match group, was quite content. Last July Bengt Nordman, an affable Swede, was sent to succeed Singh as managing director.

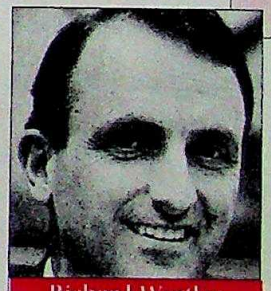
IEL Ltd (part of Britain's ICI group), has always been a storehouse of Indian talent (A.L. Mudaliar, Subroto Ganguly, S.S. Baijal). In April last year, Baijal announced that he would step down as IEL head. He was replaced by ICI's P.E.G. Daubney, his deputy for four years.

It's not a new trend. Expatriates have for long headed the Indian operations of multinational companies. But a number of foreign-controlled enterprises with a long tradition of promoting Indian managers are changing tack. These include International Computers Indian Manufacture (ICIM), Britannia Industries, Pfizer, Bank of America and Goodyear.

In ICIM's case, Prem Shivdasani quit in 1985, to be followed by two Indian chief executives, both of whom served short terms. International Computers, ICIM's British parent company, then despatched David Beesely to head the Indian computer enterprise. At Britannia, the American conglomerate R.J. Reynolds-Nabisco moved E.J. Grimstead to India late last year, and company head R.K. Lal was transferred to Nabisco's Far Eastern operations. Significantly, Britannia's chairman Rajan Pillai is a Nabisco employee based in London.

Bengt Nordman


P.E.G. Daubney


Richard Wortley

Pfizer head S.V. Pillai retired last August, but a year ago Pfizer of the US sent Joseph C. Jensen as Pillai's deputy. On August 2, Jensen succeeded Pillai. And at Bank of America, Richard Wortley took over from Ambi Venkateshwaran last February as vice-president and country head.

So what's happening? Are foreign enterprises exercising greater control over their Indian corporate associates? Well, yes and no. In many cases the Indian companies have not been faring well. ICIM will be in the red this year, and its British parent has roped in R.P. Goenka as a partner to bolster the company. For the first time last year, Wimco reported a loss. Obviously, the expatriates will serve as fire-fighters.

But at Wimco, Pfizer and IEL, no Indian manager was viewed as ready for the top slot. "There was no deep, ulterior motive," says Managing Director Daubney. "IEL has had no British chief executive for some time and I guess I had certain skills to offer."

International companies also insist that inter-country transfers are part of their corporate policy. Bank of America's Wortley says: "The bank has no set policy on expatriate postings. We feel that there should be a healthy interchange between Indian and expatriate managers." Several Indians who work for Bank of America have been posted overseas.

Expatriate chief executives do not, however, always hold the key to company turnarounds. Most prefer short tenures of between two and four years in India. This is bound to tell on corporate bottomlines. One reason is that the Indian business environment is unfamiliar to many. Admits Wimco's Nordman: "Abroad, companies only bother about the competition. Here most of the time is taken up with figuring out what the Government is going to do." According to Wortley, it takes from six months to a year for an outsider to become familiar with India. "The second year you consolidate your position. And it is only after that do you make progress," he says.

Expatriate chief executives are coming to India to bolster their associate companies despite the unfamiliar environment

Few expatriates are given such an opportunity—or want to, if India figures low in the parent company's priorities. Confesses an American company's head: "If a person wants to upgrade skills and rise at head office, it pays not to stay in India for too long."

Resentment among Indian managers at being passed over for the top job is another sticky issue. Clearly, for multinationals it will always be a tightrope walk between their priorities and the ambitions of local managers. So far, they've succeeded admirably in this task. Whether they'll continue to do so is now the question.

—S.N. VASUKI with bureau reports

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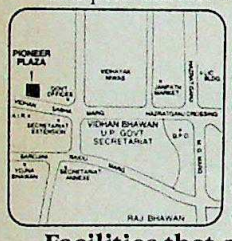

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At the heart of the Pioneer Plaza is the Business Centre which provides every kind of secretarial facility. Everything, from FAX to computers is being installed for the convenience of the occupants of the Plaza.

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Fidelia Constructions— impeccable credentials.

The Pioneer Plaza project has been undertaken by Fidelia Constructions (P) Ltd., a company promoted by the well known industrialist family—the Jaipurias. Dr. Raja Ram Jaipuria, who has rich and valuable experience in Financial Planning and Management heads the show as Chairman & Managing Director. Until recently, Dr. Jaipuria was also Chairman & Managing Director of Swadeshi Polytex Ltd., proven the most cost-efficient polyester fibre plant in the country. The Board includes Dr. Ramesh C. Vaish, who is a Chartered Accountant & Vice Chairman of Jaiprakash Industries Ltd., one of the largest construction companies in the country, with several prestigious overseas contracts. Shri Shailendra Swaroop, who is a Director in companies like Modi Xerox, Ester India Ltd., Bihar Sponge Iron Ltd., and Samtel Colour Ltd., and Senior Advocate Supreme Court of India, is also on the Board. Assisting the Board is a team of highly qualified Civil Engineers and other professionals—all with impeccable credentials.

Renowned architects.

The Board has also engaged the designing and structural expertise of M/s. Kothari & Associates to benefit its activities. The firm's list of architectural achievements includes the designing of the Bank of Baroda—New Delhi's 14-storeyed office building, Reserve Bank of India Headquarters, Jaipur, office building for Deptt. of Electronics, New Delhi, ONGC Works at Dehra Dun, Hotel Centaur, New Delhi, Shakti Bhawan, Lucknow's 15-storeyed office building, Escorts Heart Institute, New Delhi, Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Patna, and other buildings that have come to be known for their architectural excellence.

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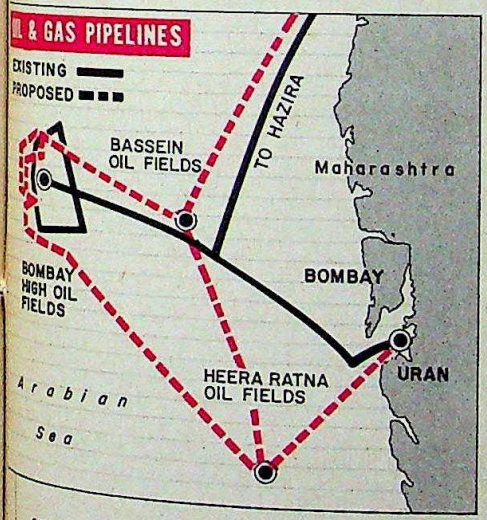
ONGC's Pipedream

THE project is huge—an ambitious Rs 1,000-crore venture that's already aroused heat. The fate of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission's (ONGC) proposal to build a new offshore pipeline could, however, be decided soon. This fortnight, former petroleum secretary Lovraj Kumar is expected to submit to the Government the recommendations of a committee on the ONGC's proposal.

Called the Western Offshore Integrated Development Plan and conceived 7 years ago, the scheme involves laying a garland-like offshore pipeline system linking Bombay High to Hazira and Uran. This is meant to supplement an existing pipeline. Citing strategic considerations, ONGC first argued that another pipeline was required because the existing pipeline could be bombed by enemy aircraft or damaged in a natural calamity. Since Bombay High produces over 65 per cent of the country's output of oil and natural gas, that would be disastrous.

The Government consulted defence



experts, who pointed out that the pipeline was no less vulnerable than the more exposed offshore drilling platforms and submarine buoy mooring systems. Next, ONGC said that the new pipeline would be required to jack up the capacity to transport new oil and gas discovered. Around this time, the Public Investment Board, referred the question to the committee.

Meanwhile, ONGC twice invited global tenders for the project, but had to hurriedly withdraw bid documents because official clearance didn't come through. ONGC is still waiting for it.

Gold reserves: undervalued

Glitter of Hope

IS concern about the country's foreign exchange reserves unwarranted? Perhaps it is. The Reserve Bank grossly undervalues the country's gold reserves at Rs 274 crore.

The figure is based on a historical cost of Rs 84 per 10 gram. The market price in Bombay is Rs 3,150. In London, it's Rs 1,924.

If the Government hawked the gold in London, it would obtain a hefty Rs 6,253 crore. In Bombay, it would get Rs 10,230 crore. Although the possibility of the Government auctioning the gold is remote, that's still some glitter of hope.

The 1992 Question

EVENTS in Europe are sending Indian businessmen and the Government into a tizzy. The dozen member-states of the European Economic Community propose to drop most fiscal and trade barriers for Community members by 1992—and Indian exporters could be placed at a serious disadvantage.

The topic figured at a managing committee meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM), one of the premier industry associations. ASSOCHAM then raised it with the Commerce Ministry. Last fortnight, a visiting group of European parliamentarians told the press that economic relations between India and the Community would not be affected. But businessmen remain unconvinced.

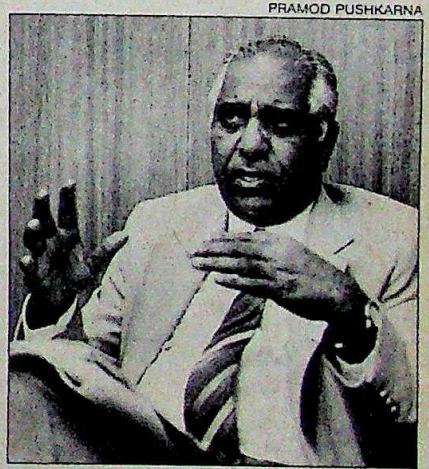
Popularly known as Project 1992, the unification could mean that Community members will adopt common purchasing postures. Indian exporters complain that they are already at a disadvantage against African, Caribbean and Pacific exporters in entering European markets. Reason: much of India's exports are governed by a more restrictive commercial agreement, the Generalised System of Preferences. In contrast, 66 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are covered by the Lome Convention, which provides them quota and duty-free access to European markets.

With about 20 per cent of India's exports being shipped to the Community, there's evidently cause for concern.

Search For a Secretary

THE Government has set up a committee headed by Cabinet Secretary B.G. Deshmukh to find a successor to the

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



Nambiar: no extension

feisty Department of Electronics Secretary K.P.P. Nambiar. His two-year term expires by the end of the year. This sets to rest speculation that Nambiar would be granted an extension. In all likelihood Nambiar will set up an electronics company in Bangalore.

The committee is casting its net wide for a successor. Said a senior official involved in the selection process: "We are looking at the public and private sectors as well as the Government." A successor has not yet been found but some names are expected to be shortlisted this fortnight.

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After a period of sustained price increases, last fortnight at last saw seasonal pressures take effect as the wholesale price index turned downwards. Gold prices, however, saw a bullish trend following a long period of stability. The stock-market boom continues indicating remarkable—if not wholly called for—optimism in the economy.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

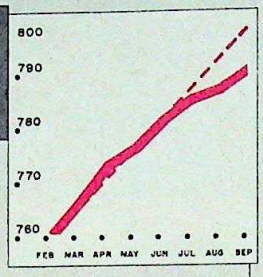
Current Trend
1.0% p.a.

Wholesale prices started declining last fortnight—a welcome relief after a period of sharp increase.

Consumer Price Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
8.7% p.a.

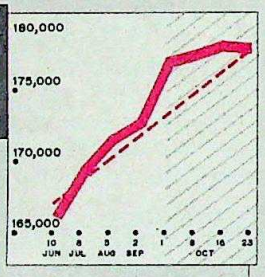


Consumer prices increased last month at a moderate rate—working out to a 5 per cent annualised rate.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.03% p.a.

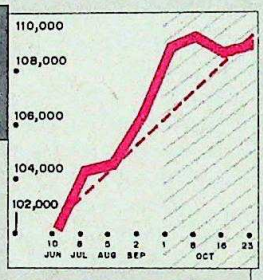


Money supply increased at a faster than targeted rate last fortnight and may cause inflationary pressures.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
18.4% p.a.

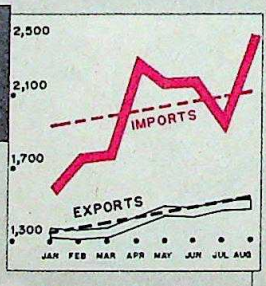


Credit conditions tightened last fortnight though overall credit has remained easy for some time now.

Foreign Trade

Rs Crore

Current Trend
21.0% p.a.
EXPORTS
15.7% p.a.
IMPORTS

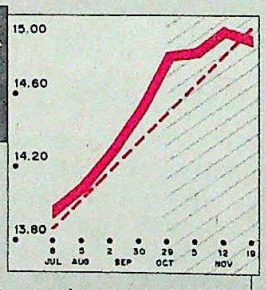


Exports still outstrip imports by a clear 5 per cent in the long-term trend though last month imports were higher.

Foreign Exchange Rate

Rs $

Current Trend
21.58% p.a.

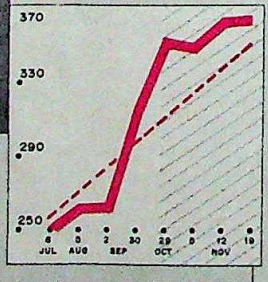


The rupee continues to drop against the dollar. And the trend showed no signs of reversing last fortnight.

Share Price Index

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
86.6% p.a.

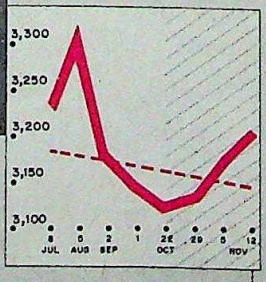


Share prices have been booming and, in keeping with the trend, continued to rise sharply last fortnight.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
3.2% p.a.



Gold prices increased sharply in the second week of November. This rise issues after a long period of stability.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the 2nd fortnight of October 1988

	% Growth
Urad	22.79
Eggs	7.89
Chillies	5.72
Fish	4.98
Jowar	4.05
Bananas	3.83
Groundnut Seeds	2.23
Ghee	2.17
Mustard Oilcake	1.80
Cotton Yarn	1.42
Barley	1.38
Vanaspati	1.28
Art Silk and Artificial Silk	1.28
Betelnuts	1.25
Furnace Oil	1.24
Tea	1.22
Copra	1.18
Lubricating Oil	1.18
Mining Machinery	1.15
Diesel Oil	1.13
Rice	1.12
Cotton Seed	1.01
Alta	0.92
Jowar	0.92
Mustard Oil	0.92
Turmeric	0.82
Gingelly Seed	0.78
Rape and Mustard Seed	0.42
Hides Raw	0.38
Vanaspati	0.26
Cashewnuts	0.11
Gingelly Oil	−0.10
Coconut Oil	−0.17
Linseed	−0.19
Cotton Yarn	−0.28
Sugar	−0.66
Groundnut Oilcake	−1.00
Groundnut Oil	−1.16
Rice	−1.24
Tapioca	−1.42
Jute Textiles	−1.65
Khandsari	−2.05
Zinc	−3.02
Mustard Oil	−3.55
Gur	−6.36

Of the 139 series considered, 14 of them with a total weight of 18.79 had a negative growth and 18 of them with a total weight of 10.13 had a positive growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Coal Thousand Tonnes, October	15177	13825
Saleable Steel Thousand Tonnes, October	773.5	740.0
Cement Thousand Tonnes, October	3568	3383
Petroleum Crude Thousand Tonnes, October	2729	2507
Petroleum Refinery Products Thousand Tonnes, October	3793	3689

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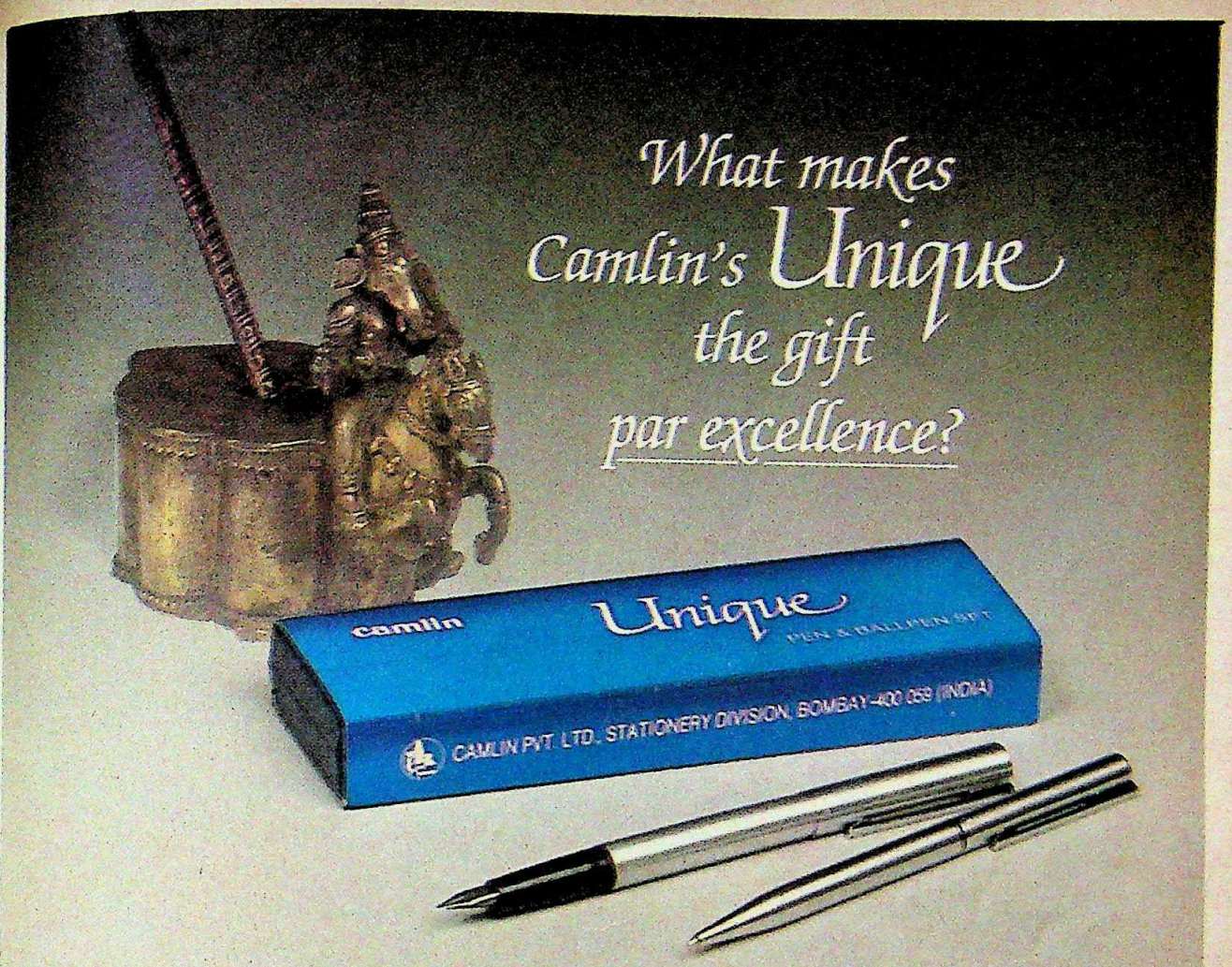

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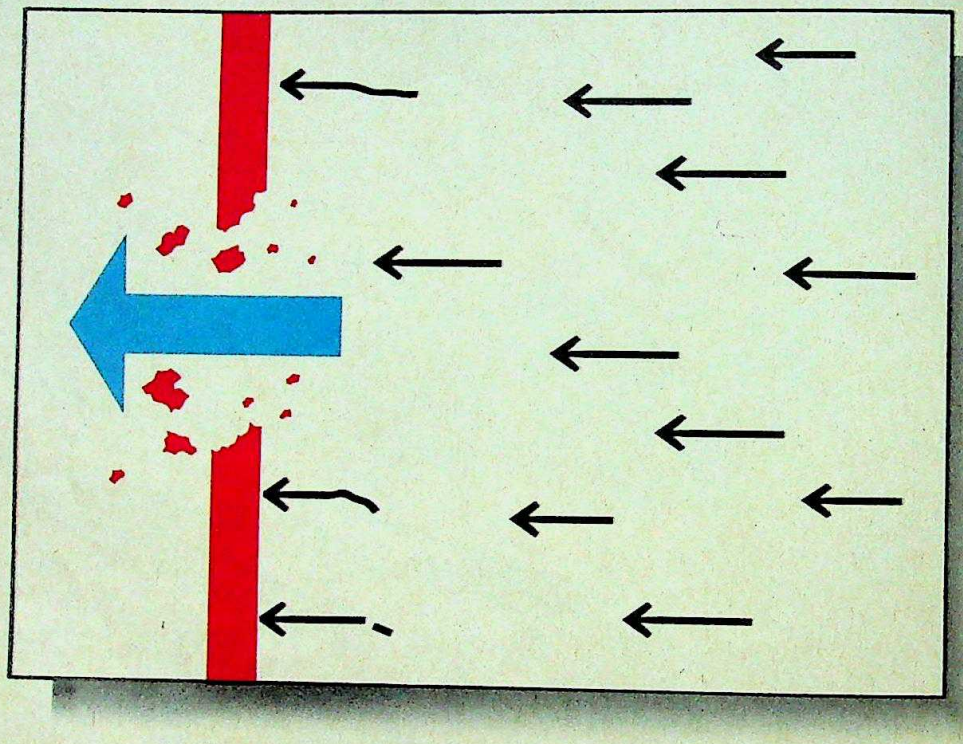

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THE MARKETS

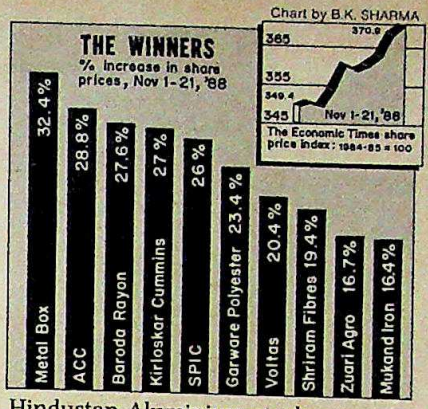
Shooting Up

Share prices soar further

THE stock-markets are booming as ever, with share prices soaring to even further highs. Price indices continue to shatter new records, virtually every share worth its salt is on the upswing and the market for new share issues is going great guns.

Indeed, scrips whose prices have for long been depressed, such as Rama Fibres, Bihar Caustic, Pefco Industries and Samrat Bicycles, have perked up by 100 to 300 per cent. And with the weather gods kind to the country, fertiliser company scrips are flourishing. Other shares whose prices have surged include those of cement and drug companies. Associated Cement, for instance, was up by 59 per cent, and Hindustan Ciba Geigy by 20 per cent.

The market leaders are sharply up too. After the Government announced that aluminium prices would be raised for the third time in less than two years,



Hindustan Aluminium stock was, predictably, quoted higher. The case was the same with Tisco after rumours did the rounds that steel prices would be up.

Portraying the upbeat mood, the 30-scrip Bombay Stock Exchange index of equity prices shot up from 709.03 to 719.07 between November 9 and November 19. Other indices too moved up sharply. *The Economic Times* index climbed from 360.7 to set a new high for the year at 370.9, between November 9 and November 21.

Amidst the happy times, a discordant note was struck by the Bombay Stock Exchange. It has been unable to cope with the rapid rise in the volume of trading. On November 22, the exchange closed so that it could complete "settlement work in respect of cash traded shares." And when the country's premier stock exchange has to close to catch up on two months' arrears of work, there's obviously a major problem that has to be tackled on a war footing. Clearly, the stock-market boom has uncovered some key weaknesses of the market.

While that will continue to dog the market authorities in the days ahead, they've been slapping 20 per cent margins on shares. In Calcutta too, brokers had to face stiff penalties of up to Rs 1 lakh. Evidently, there's some fear that the market is getting overheated.

One result of the official measures is that private financiers of "carry-over" share deals (where scrips are not taken delivery of) have jacked up their interest rates. Even so, it's still not clear whether the official steps will tell on a bull-dominated market. Late last fortnight, there were few signs of any such trend. For the moment, the bulls continue to rage. But the days ahead could be revealing.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 21.11.88	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	70.50	30.25	70.50	7.75 +
Associated Cement	399.00	128.50	391.00	59.00 +
Atlas Copco	66.00	33.50	55.00	2.00 –
Asian Paints	232.50	128.75	227.50	12.50 +
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	410.50	27.50 +
Baroda Rayon	385.00	140.00	370.00	65.00 +
Bata India	89.00	50.50	87.00	4.00 +
Bharat Forge	200.00	101.00	195.00	10.00 +
Birla Jute	55.00	32.25	53.50	7.00 +
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	47.00	5.50 –
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	138.50	5.50 +
Brooke Bond	122.00	75.00	116.00	6.00 +
Britannia Ind.	121.00	75.00	112.00	3.00 +
Century Spinning	1535.00	617.50	1480.00	30.00 +
Chloride India	83.00	59.00	80.00	4.00 +
Colgate	335.00	160.00	320.00	7.50 –
Cyanamid	72.50	33.00	64.00	1.50 +
DCM	55.00	28.00	35.75	7.50 –
Dunlop	97.00	66.00	97.00	12.00 +
E.I. Hotels	62.50	38.00	60.00	4.00 +
Escorts	72.00	37.00	68.00	3.50 +
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	380.00	10.00 –
Food Specialities	178.75	93.50	175.00	5.00 +
Garware Nylon	56.00	20.00	47.00	nil
G.E. Shipping	45.00	20.50	43.00	nil
Gujarat St Fertilisers	172.00	75.00	147.50	8.75 +
Grasim Ind.	118.00	74.00	91.00	10.00 +
Hind. Ciba	691.00	332.50	660.00	20.00 +
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	126.25	15.00 +
Hindustan Lever	92.00	59.50	84.00	1.00 +
Hindustan Motors	34.00	15.80	30.60	0.70 –
Hind. Aluminium	141.00	73.00	137.00	12.00 +
ITI	59.50	31.00	54.00	1.00 –
Indian Organic	51.00	15.00	48.00	5.00 +
Indian Rayon	90.00	46.00	88.00	7.50 +
Indrol	291.25	133.75	265.00	5.00 –
Ingersoll-Rand	370.00	205.00	325.00	5.00 +
ITC	64.00	30.00	48.50	2.25 –
J.K. Synthetics	94.00	45.50	91.00	6.00 +
Kinetic Engineering	410.00	161.25	342.50	3.75 –
Kirloskar Cummins	100.00	48.00	100.00	21.25 +
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	325.00	nil
Larsen & Toubro	148.50	75.50	132.50	2.50 +
Lipton	84.00	52.00	82.00	5.00 +
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	15.00	1.00 +
Madura Coats	95.00	59.00	95.00	1.00 +
Mahindra & Mahindra	120.00	48.50	117.50	2.00 –
Milk Food	290.00	72.50	245.00	10.00 –
Motor Industries	700.00	447.50	650.00	nil
Mukand Iron	128.00	72.50	128.00	13.00 +
National Organic	990.00	390.00	935.00	25.00 +
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	13.00	0.50 +
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	44.00	4.50 +
Pelco Electronics	40.00	24.50	33.50	2.00 +
Pfizer	90.00	50.00	86.00	7.00 +
Premier Auto	58.00	23.00	55.50	nil
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	85.00	10.00 +
Raymond	96.00	41.50	67.00	3.00 +
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	173.50	3.50 –
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	87.00	5.50 +
Shriram Fibres	67.00	32.50	64.50	8.75 +
SKF Bearings	2420.00	1058.00	2350.00	50.00 +
Siemens India	116.00	56.00	103.00	7.00 –
SPIC	68.00	23.50	65.50	12.00 +
Tata Steel	1097.50	568.75	1076.50	29.00 +
Telco	785.00	340.00	762.50	27.50 +
Voltas	580.00	225.00	530.00	80.00 +
Wimco	30.00	11.00	27.50	1.50 +
Vam Organic	143.00	75.00	126.00	4.00 –
Videocon Int.	70.00	18.00	60.00	2.00 *

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WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	12.9540	12.8192
Austria	Schilling	100	1.2457	1.2285
Bahrain	Dinar	1	40.2546	40.0000
Bangladesh	Taka	100	48.7528	48.6021
Canada	Dollar	1	12.5090	12.3360
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.2665	2.2418
Egypt	Pound	1	6.6921	6.6030
France	Franc	1	2.5974	2.5316
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.9449	1.9256
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0890	0.8000
Iran	Rial	100	22.32	22.00
Italy	Lira	100	1.1110	1.0620
Japan	Yen	100	12.5780	12.2699
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8432	0.8010
Kuwait	Dinar	1	54.2622	54.0000
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.6897	5.6320
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.1260	1.0921
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6326	0.6100
Netherlands	Guilder	1	7.7538	7.6702
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8210	0.7528
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.7944	7.743
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1040	0.840
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4670	0.4422
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.5055	2.4769
Switzerland	Franc	1	10.4013	10.2926
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1800	0.1600
Thailand	Baht	100	57.8220	57.6020
UK	Pound	1	27.4311	27.2889
USA	Dollar	1	15.1860	15.0376
UAE	Dirham	1	4.0000	3.90
USSR	Rouble	1	18.2201	18.0860
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	8.8731	8.6505

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 21.11.88.

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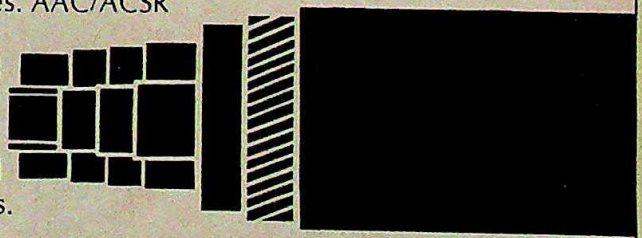

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ANDHRA PRADESH

A New Bag of Tricks

Magicians roped in to bolster Rama Rao's image

A young man in an unusual black bow and coat draws a motley crowd of villagers. He takes out a cylinder with a flourish and turns it upside down. It is empty. He puts a two-rupee note in, closes the cylinder, picks a black wand, waves it thrice and shifts it from left hand to right. Then he opens the cylinder and empties out a heap of rice on a plate to the applause of the wonderstruck villagers. With this, 27-year-old Vishnuvardhan Reddy, well-known in his native Pratapsingharam village, has not only pulled off a trick but conveyed a telling message. "This is the Government's gift to the poor for two rupees," he says, to tremendous applause.

This is the latest offering from Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao's saffron bag of tricks. And Reddy is one of the 58 handpicked magicians doing the round of villages in the state since November 1 to broadcast the Telugu Desam Government's programmes and spread its progressive image. Clearly, when it comes to novel publicity gimmicks Rama Rao is streets ahead of his rivals. The man who rollercoasted to victory on the wings of his charismatic film image, and exploited the video cassette to carry his voice across, has gone a step further.

Rama Rao got the idea of the barefooted magician while watching a show by the well-known magician, B.V. Pattabhi Ram during the Andhra Pradesh formation day celebrations last year.

Ram that day had demonstrated his familiar 'water-of-India' trick. He produced water from a seemingly empty vessel and drained it dry to show that the source had dried up, conveying graphically that the Telugu Ganga project can be used to carry water to Madras as well as irrigate parched Rayalaseema, and that it is political squabbles that have dried up the flow. He took out another empty cylinder and turned it around to show several plants sprouting out of it. The message—need for tree planting and conservation of plants.

Fascinated, Rama Rao immediately asked the Vice-Chancellor of Telugu University, T. Donappa, to introduce a crash course to train magicians. Within a few weeks, Ram was appointed course director, a six-week course was devised and the first batch of 10 students were enrolled. They were selected after confirming that they were jobless, came from poor families and wanted to take this career seriously. Each was given a kit worth Rs 1,000 after the training.

Defending this step, Donappa declared: "Magic is one of the 64 arts mentioned in the texts of yore and fits in well with the university's charter to promote Telugu arts and culture." Rama Rao this year even granted official recognition for magic as an art. He roped in the state Directorate of Information and Public Relations and Ram was called in to enlist magicians—new as well as others—to do the village rounds. "Our aim is to promote magic like other folk art forms, entertain rural audiences and, incidentally, to put across a few educative messages," says Information Minister Veerabhadra Rao.

Elaborating, Ram said: "If we talk about a message it will be dull and boring. Every trick or stunt is based on a known principle of science or mathematics and all that we are doing is to create an impact." He should know, for at 39, he has 20 years of experience behind him. His earlier job with the Food Corporation of India too involved the use of magic for campaigns like the one to save grain.

To make this clear, Ram organised a workshop for the newly-enrolled magicians to brief them that their shows would be no crude exercises but a softsell of the Government's goals and programmes. Accordingly, they were told to highlight welfare measures like the rice subsidy and adult education, as well as concepts like national integration and removal of untouchability.

One such trick is the 'devil's slate' where the magician waves a pair of slates, spins them around and shows on one side the words inscribed "*kuudu, guudu, gudda*" (the Telugu equivalent of *roti, kapda aur makan*). But, being hard realists, the magician graduates are aware that excessive stress on the welfare programmes may backfire, with the audiences losing interest. So the rule of thumb is to project welfare programmes in one out of five tricks. In such scattered doses they go down well with the audiences.

The programme begins with the usual sleight-of-hand, like producing a flower out of a lit candle or joining torn pieces of paper and producing the torn pieces from the palm. Then the magicians slowly move to the delicate job of conveying a

Photographs by SHYAM TEKWANI

Pattabhi Ram produces a banner from an empty cylinder which has details of the minimum age for marriage and the punishment for law breakers.

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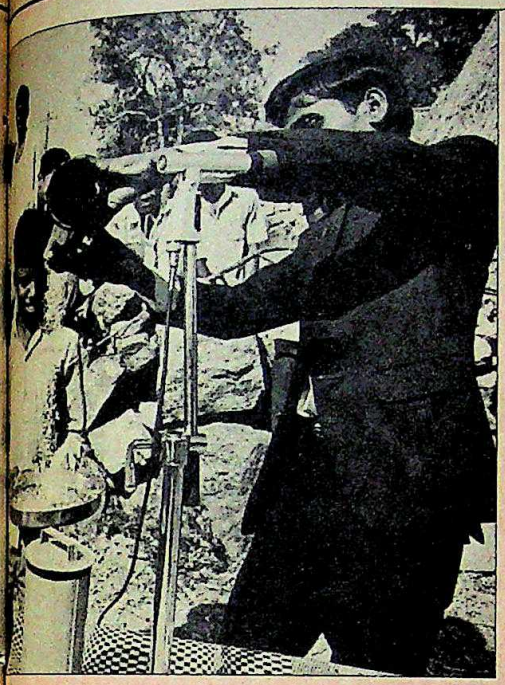


Vishnuvardhan Reddy shows an empty cylinder, and drops a two-rupee note into it. When he opens the cylinder, rice falls in a heap.

message. The methods vary. Ram, for instance, produces from an empty cylinder a banner carrying details of the laws regarding the minimum age for marriage and the punishment for defying these.

Another magician, B.V.S. Nagesh, calls three elderly men from the crowd. He asks them to wear decorative caps and makes them drop coins into the caps. From these, instead of a rabbit, he draws out a string of currency notes and the message goes out loud and clear—the importance of small-scale savings for old age. Gajula Bhadraiah, whose stage name is Kiran, has two men called to the stage and asks them whether they had demanded dowry. As both deny this vehemently, he asks them to blow at a rope. While the rope is steady when one of them blows at it, it begins to wobble for the other. The magician accuses the second of taking dowry and hiding the fact. Having failed the lie detector test, the contrite man goes back repentant. The social message, once again, stands proclaimed aloud.

Another trick is the use of curved sticks, painted black and red, which are placed one above the other. The black one below the red looks definitely shorter. They are then placed together to show that they are of the same length, to drive home the point that caste discrimination is man-made. Says Nagesh: "We play on the psyche and sometimes use the usual visual tricks to convey the idea."

It is after sensing this potential that the state Government thought of commissioning 58 magicians at Rs 350 a day for four days in a month for public functions in the districts. This, however, does not prevent them from carrying on with their usual shows elsewhere. For the magicians newly-employed by the state Government, this makes a big difference. Says Bhadraiah, 21, a school drop-out: "I cannot think of a more respectable way than entertaining people to make a living."

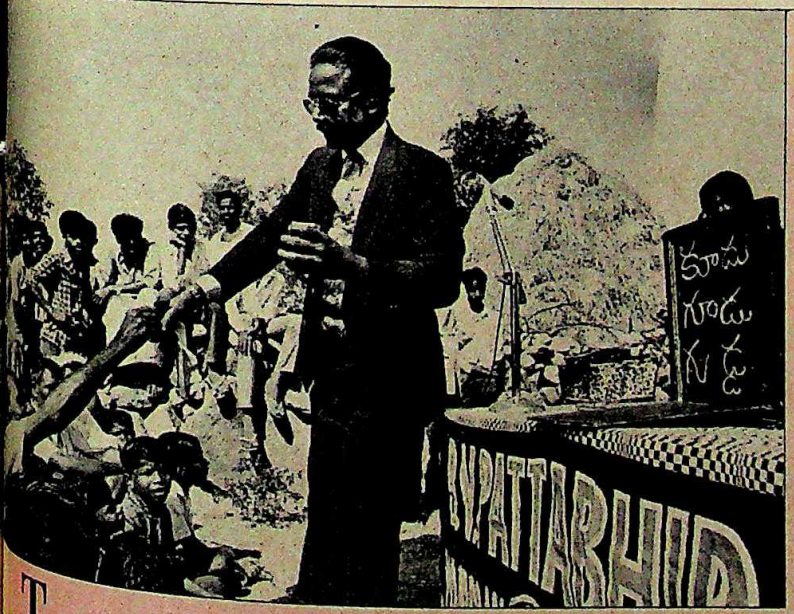
Apart from the Telugu University which is turning out magicians, Hyderabad has a formal magic school where classes are held once a month for an annual fee of Rs 100. And there is also the eight-year-old Balanandam Magic School.

"Magic is no ordinary entertainment, it is a social drive. You can learn, teach and have fun," asserts K. Prasuna, a B.Sc. final year student in Hyderabad. She is hooked on to magic because of her interest in mathematics and is among the 20-odd budding women magicians. But most stay amateur, not going beyond learning a few tricks, says Ram.

The growing interest taken by the Rama Rao Government to promote magic, with the university's next academic year beginning in December, poses its own challenges as well as spin-offs. Ram and company are also using their skills to fight the menace of *banamati* (black magic) prevalent in districts around Hyderabad. Here the magicians have added a new item to their repertoire. They take out coins and nails from some person in the audience to demonstrate that black magic is only a trick. They also fight godmen and people who exploit the gullible.

Since the line between magic and trickery is razor thin it can be a double-edged weapon. And Rama Rao, a master at exploiting every facet of his charisma, has added another weapon to his stockpile.

—AMARNATH K. MENON



The magician waves two slates, spins them in the air and produces one side with the words *Kuudu, Guudu, Gudda* to emphasise the Government's welfare programmes

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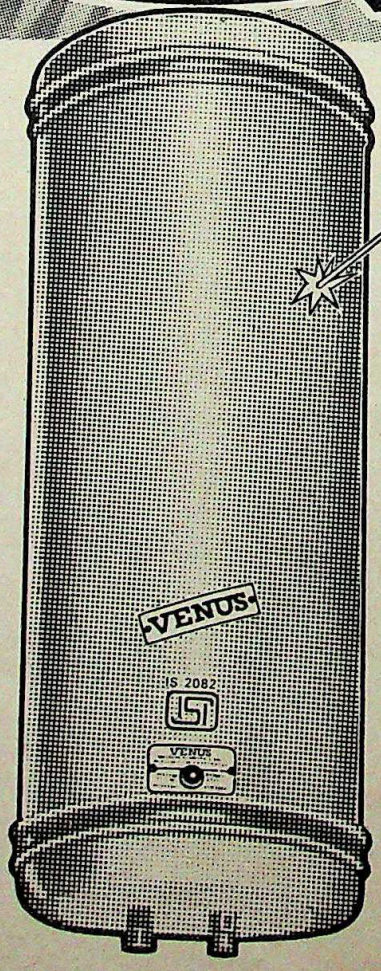

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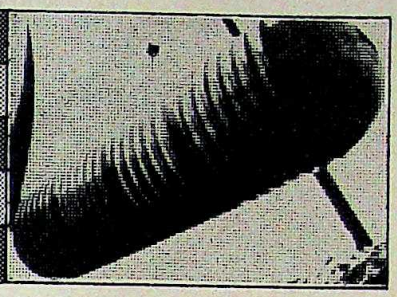

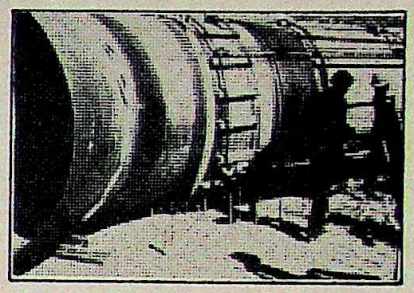

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INDIAN AIR FORCE

Vulnerability in the Skies

Faulty aircraft and poor training cripple air wing

The accident rate of the Indian Air Force (IAF) has been worrying defence planners for some time now. But last fortnight the situation reached disturbing proportions with five fighters crashing within a 10-day period forcing the IAF top brass to ground seven frontline fighter squadrons for thorough checks. An in-depth report:

FOR more than a week Delhi's residents had become inured to the roar of low-flying fighters. Around 9.30 every morning MiG-25M (Trishuls) of the IAF would roar past the southern and western parts of the capital in elegant 'V' formations. They were rehearsing for the flypast to mark the presentation of colours to the 17 Squadron by President R. Venkataraman on November 8. Everything went hunky-dory till the day of the flypast itself when one of the MiGs veered off course and fell on a cluster of huts, killing four. The pilot, Squadron Leader R. Malhotra ejected safely.

Questions were immediately asked about the quality, maintenance and handling of the IAF aircraft. And the questioning could have been a lot more strident if the press had come to know of other similar accidents that were taking place around the same time. Three other MiG-21s had crashed within 48 hours of the Delhi accident, fortunately away from populated areas but marking, nevertheless, one of the saddest weeks in the IAF's peacetime history.

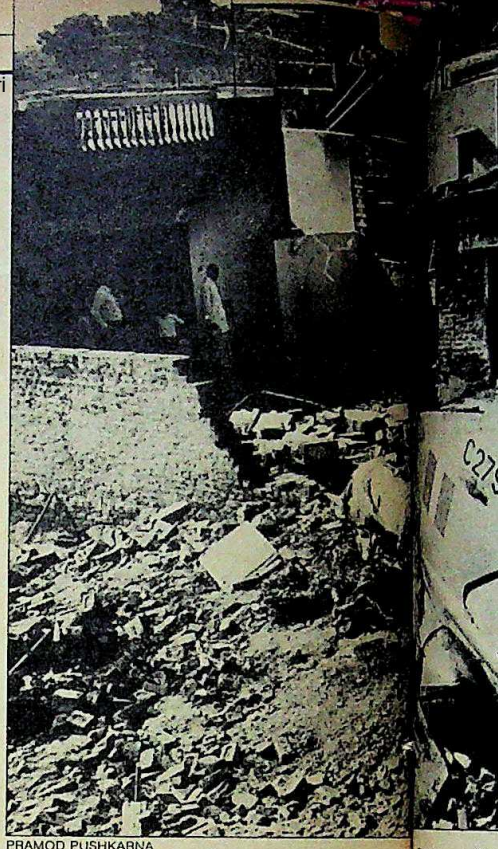
A week later yet another MiG crashed near Jamnagar. Then the IAF brass decided to ground seven fighter squadrons, all flying the 'M' or 'MF' variants of MiGs, manufactured by the public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL). The aircraft will be grounded for thorough checks. Effectively that means taking out some of the most important squadrons from the nation's air defence order of battle. But the air force asserts that if war were to suddenly break out the squadrons would fly, despite the risk.

The move was reminiscent of what had happened to some MiG squadrons in 1985 as well (INDIA TODAY, June 15, 1986). Worse, it came when the IAF was under pressure to explain its rather high accident rate: nearly 1.4 per 10,000 hours of flying compared, rather unfavourably, to the US Air Force's .65 per 100,000 hours. 1987 had been a particularly bad year for the IAF with at least 53 major accidents.

What set off the alarm bells last fortnight was the fact that all the accidents involved the same kind of aircraft. It was clear that each one had had an engine problem. Without any warning the pilots had experienced engine failure and flame-out and had to eject. "Fortunately in each case the pilot survived," said a senior officer, "but who likes to fly fighters with suspect engines?"

Top-level sources in Vayu Bhawan say the problem lies with the engines manufactured indigenously using raw materials imported from the Soviet Union. But the current problem is probably different from 1985 when a faulty heat shield had led to tail-unit fires. One of the more credible guesses is that the problem lies with the shaft that connects the gearbox with the engine. Even in the past the IAF has had complaints about the dual bolts that hold the shaft in place. There were frequent cases of the bolts coming unstuck, seizing the engine. HAL was asked to find a way out but the IAF was never satisfied with its modifications.

The current crisis too has led to yet another round of recriminations between HAL and its biggest and captive buyer, the IAF. As the IAF yet again lodged serious complaints about HAL's quality control with the Defence Ministry, the nation's monopoly aircraft manufacturer was strident in defence. "It is absolutely unfair to blame HAL. Our quality controls are excellent. It is well known that nearly 50 per cent of all our accidents are caused by bird strikes," said Air Vice-Marshal U. Khushalani, HAL's director of corporate planning. Wing Commander A.C. Sood, managing director of the HAL MiG complex at Nasik, too made similar assertions. The officers pointed out that they too were part of the IAF and were acutely concerned about the pilots' safety.



PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

IAF officers have also pointed out that HAL-made aircraft other than MiGs too have had problems. "The Jaguar gave us many complaints. But the aircraft has two engines and is generally a lot more forgiving than an MiG-21," says an air marshal. Almost every year in the month of March, as the financial year ends, there is a dogfight between the IAF and HAL over the delivery of planes committed to be bought.

Privately, HAL loyalists are prepared to join issue with the IAF. Said an officer: "It will be much better if, rather than blame us each time something went wrong, the IAF took a second look at its own maintenance and training standards." HAL asserts that the IAF has had problems not just with the machines made by it but also with many others. "It is just that the MiGs with HAL markings form the bulk of the frontline squadrons that take much more stress even during peacetime. Accidents are only to be expected," is the argument. They also point out that two of the hi-tech Mirage-2000s have crashed, one during a mission near Sirsa, in Haryana, and the other near Gwalior.

Similarly, at least two of the trisonic MiG-25s (Garuda) have crashed and HAL had nothing to do with them. Again, this year alone, there have been two major crashes, involving Soviet-built transport aircraft. On March 12 a four-engined AN-12 took off from the Charbatiya Airport in

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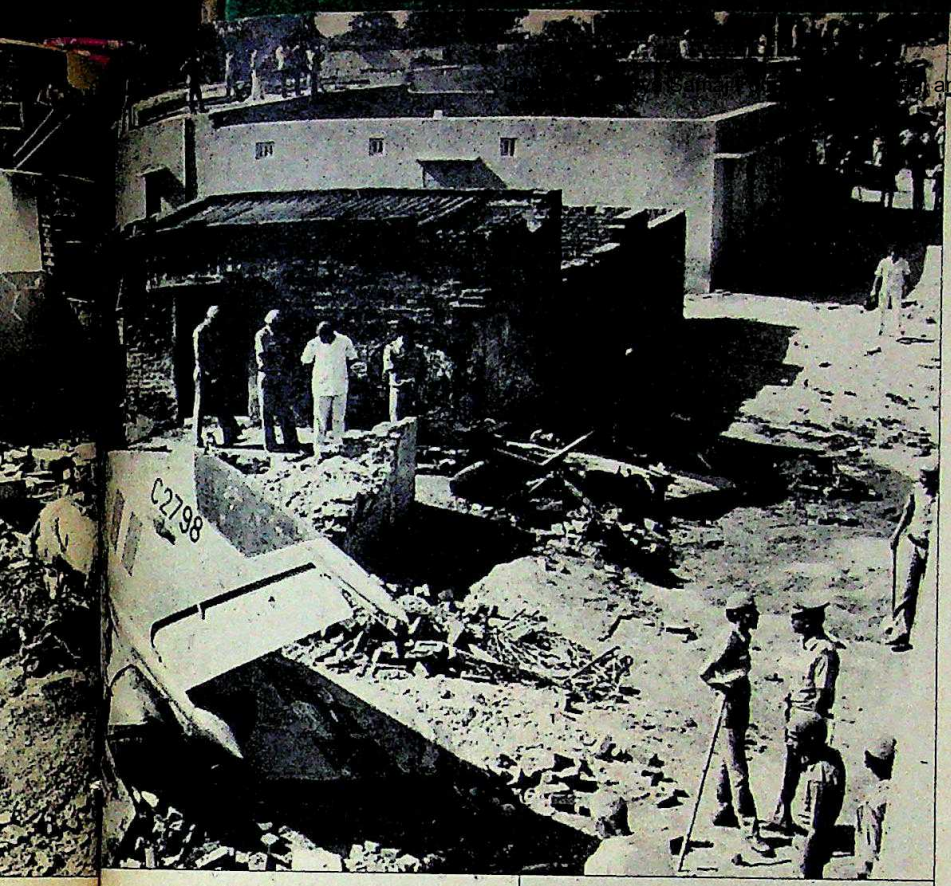
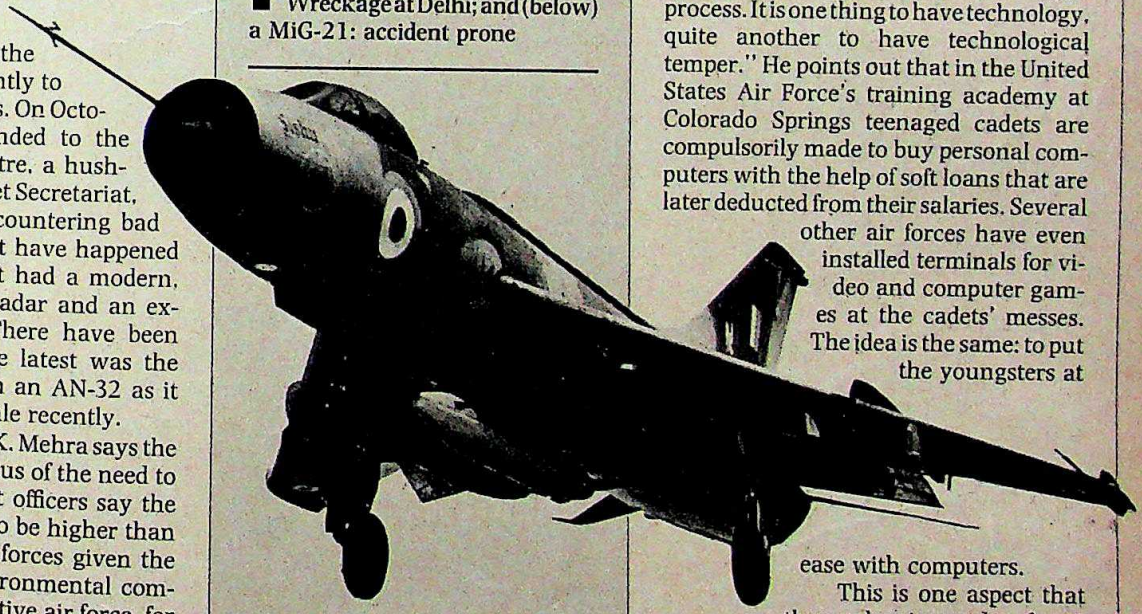


■ Wreckage at Delhi; and (below) a MiG-21: accident prone



The recent spate of accidents involving MiGs has led to a lot of questions about the quality, maintenance and handling of IAF aircraft.

Orissa, immediately caught fire and crashed despite the fact that the crew had reacted instantly to employ fire-fighting aids. On October 4 an AN-32 seconded to the Aviation Research Centre, a hush-hush wing of the Cabinet Secretariat, broke in midair on encountering bad weather. This shouldn't have happened considering the aircraft had a modern, multi-colour weather radar and an experienced navigator. There have been other near shaves. The latest was the pressurisation failure in an AN-32 as it began to descend at Male recently.

Air Chief Marshal S.K. Mehra says the IAF is extremely conscious of the need to minimise accidents. But officers say the accident rate is bound to be higher than that of the western air forces given the IAF's strategic and environmental compulsions. "We are an active air force, for which war could begin at a day's notice. So we have to undertake a lot of low, hazardous flying," says an air marshal. Experts quote statistics to prove that on an average an Indian pilot flies twice as much as his counterpart in the US and thrice as much as pilots in the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force. The logic, as a young fighter pilot explained, is, "he who rides the horse more often is also more likely to fall off it". Also, low-flying aircraft in India encounter the menace of bird-hits, which is greater in this country.

Officers also assert that the IAF's accident rate is only marginally higher than that of the Pakistan Air Force. But they accept that there is scope for improvement. Much more, for example, could be done to modernise the system of pilot training. This would minimise not only accidents during early training but also subsequently in operational flying.

Pilot training is truly the IAF's Achilles' heel today. The top IAF officers react violently when their pilot training system is compared unfavourably with Pakistan. But there is a grudging acceptance of the fact that willy nilly the IAF training system has fallen in "some kind of a rut" as one air marshal puts it.

While the country has rapidly modernised its frontline fleet of combat and transport aircraft, the crucial training arm that ultimately decides the overall quality of an air force has been ignored. While major air forces all over the world are changing their training regimen with the times the IAF has not kept pace adequately. Admits a senior officer: "No thought has yet been given to bridging the technology gap in our men's thought process. It is one thing to have technology, quite another to have technological temper." He points out that in the United States Air Force's training academy at Colorado Springs teenaged cadets are compulsorily made to buy personal computers with the help of soft loans that are later deducted from their salaries. Several other air forces have even installed terminals for video and computer games at the cadets' messes. The idea is the same: to put the youngsters at ease with computers.

This is one aspect that the IAF has ignored so far. A veteran points out that a decade ago a pilot could be briefed for a combat sortie in a few minutes. "Today, the process may take an hour and a half as the man gets his parameters, sets his computers accordingly and absorbs the data, " he says, adding, "while modern aircraft are easier to fly they involve more complicated handling". As a makeshift measure, the IAF has set up specialised schools, under its TETTRA (Technical Type Training) and MCF (Maintenance Conversion Flight) concepts, to impart specialised 22 to 24-

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week training to flying and ground personnel transitioning to new aircraft that involve quantum jumps in technology.

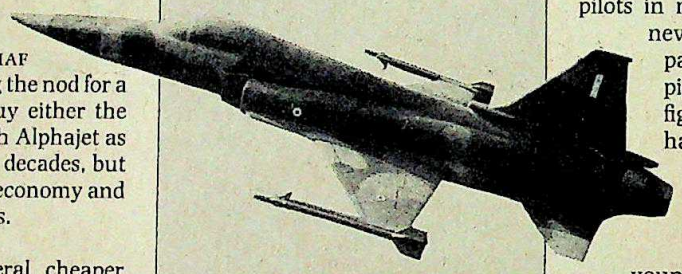
Yet makeshift measures are just that. The IAF's real handicap is the lack of a modern trainer. Says a squadron commander: "It is ridiculous that the fifth largest air force in the world doesn't even have a squadron of advanced jet trainers to hone pilots before they enter the cockpits of Mirages and MiG-29s." For almost a decade, the IAF's demand for a jet trainer has been put off for want of resources.

Thus while the frontline squadrons have quickly transitioned from Canberras to Jaguars and from Hunters to Mirages, the pilots still train on the odd combination of ageing Kirans and the few old Polish Iskras. "It is a little like taking a youngster to a driving school that only has the old Morris Minors and then pushing him into a Mercedes," complains a fighter pilot. Last year the IAF had come closest to getting the nod for a Rs 3,000-crore deal to buy either the British Hawk or the French Alphajet as the trainer for the coming decades, but the drought shattered the economy and put paid to the IAF's hopes.

SUBSEQUENTLY, several cheaper options have been considered. For some time there was a school of thought that the IAF could buy a substantial number of the MiG-21U trainer variant from the Soviet Union at a fairly low price. But it is hardly the answer to the needs of a truly modern air force as the cockpit technology is still of the '60s vintage. Worse, the MiG-21U is at best a makeshift trainer. It has two seats in tandem arrangement and the instructor, who sits behind, does not have a full parallel set of controls. Also, his seat is lower than that of the pilot and he can hardly see what his trainee is doing—unless he strains at a periscope that has, thoughtfully, been provided.

The other trainers have parallel controls and could help raw pilots iron out their problems before they develop bad flying habits. Due to a good monsoon the proposal has been revived. It was not without reason last fortnight that Northrop, the American aeronautics giant, sent a high-level team to the air headquarters to give a presentation of the trainer version of their F-5. Northrop has offered to transfer its entire manufacturing facility to India and is providing competition to Hawk and Alphajet.

■ French Alphajets; and (below) F-5: stiff competition



Northrop, the US aviation company which makes the F-5 planes, has offered to transfer its entire manufacturing facility to India.

Which trainer finally gets the nod—or whether one is purchased at all—will be a contentious decision. After the Bofors fiasco South Block has been extremely wary about defence deals. And this deal is twice the magnitude of Bofors. But an early decision is vital as there is always a gap of nearly a year between the finalisation of deals and delivery. The outgoing chief, Air Chief Marshal Dennis A. La Fontaine, is believed to have told the Government that unless a decision on the trainer is taken quickly it will become difficult to fill up the fast depleting ranks of the IAF pilots by 1992 or so.

As a matter of fact, the IAF has already begun to reach a paradoxical situation where it has more aircraft than pilots in many squadrons. "This had never happened before. In the past there were always more pilots than aircraft," says a fighter veteran. The situation has been caused partly by the low turnover from training schools and partly by the fact that, given the risks involved in fighter flying, young cadets are increasingly opting for what were, till a decade ago, the less glamorous branches.

The crisis caused by the rise in cockpit vacancies is further complicated by the depleting technical ranks. The gravity of the situation is evident from the fact that in sheer desperation, the IAF has begun approaching recently retired personnel for re-employment. Offers of re-employment and commutation of pension are also likely to be made to those superseded officers who have put in their papers out of frustration.

Top-level IAF planners say the personnel crisis is real and, though it may not be contributing directly to accidents now, could promise disaster in future. "Whether it is the purchase of the trainer or recasting IAF service conditions to make it more attractive we have to move urgently," says a strike pilot.

The accidents will not go away. They are part of the flying profession as much as that of the coalminers which is reckoned to be only the second most risky avocation after flying fighters. But the last thing a magnificent outfit like the IAF deserves is badly made flying machines.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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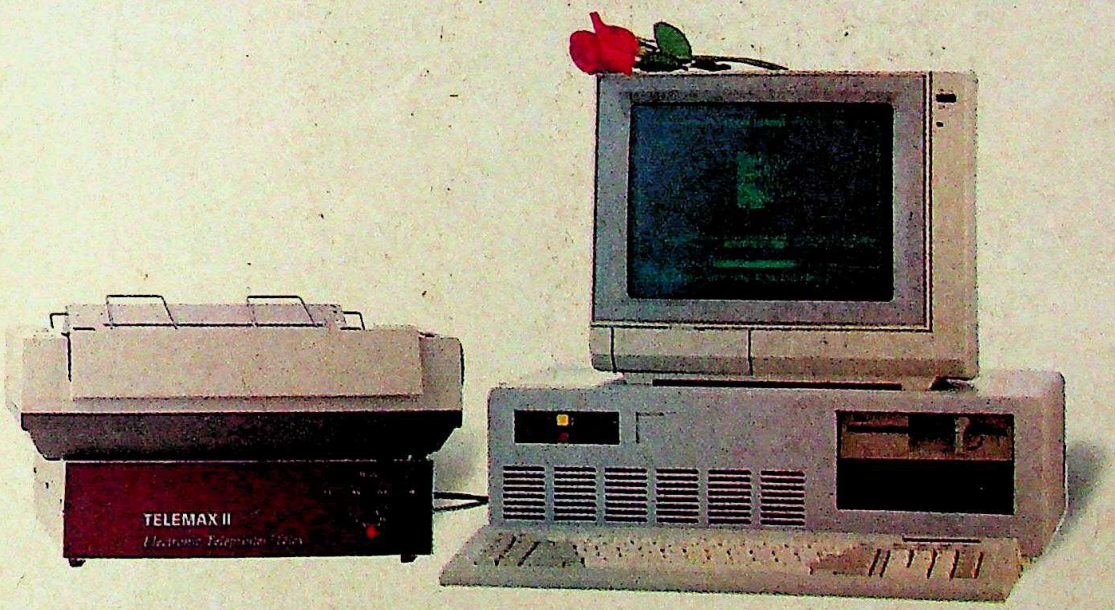

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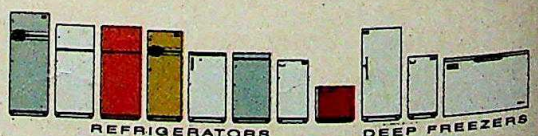

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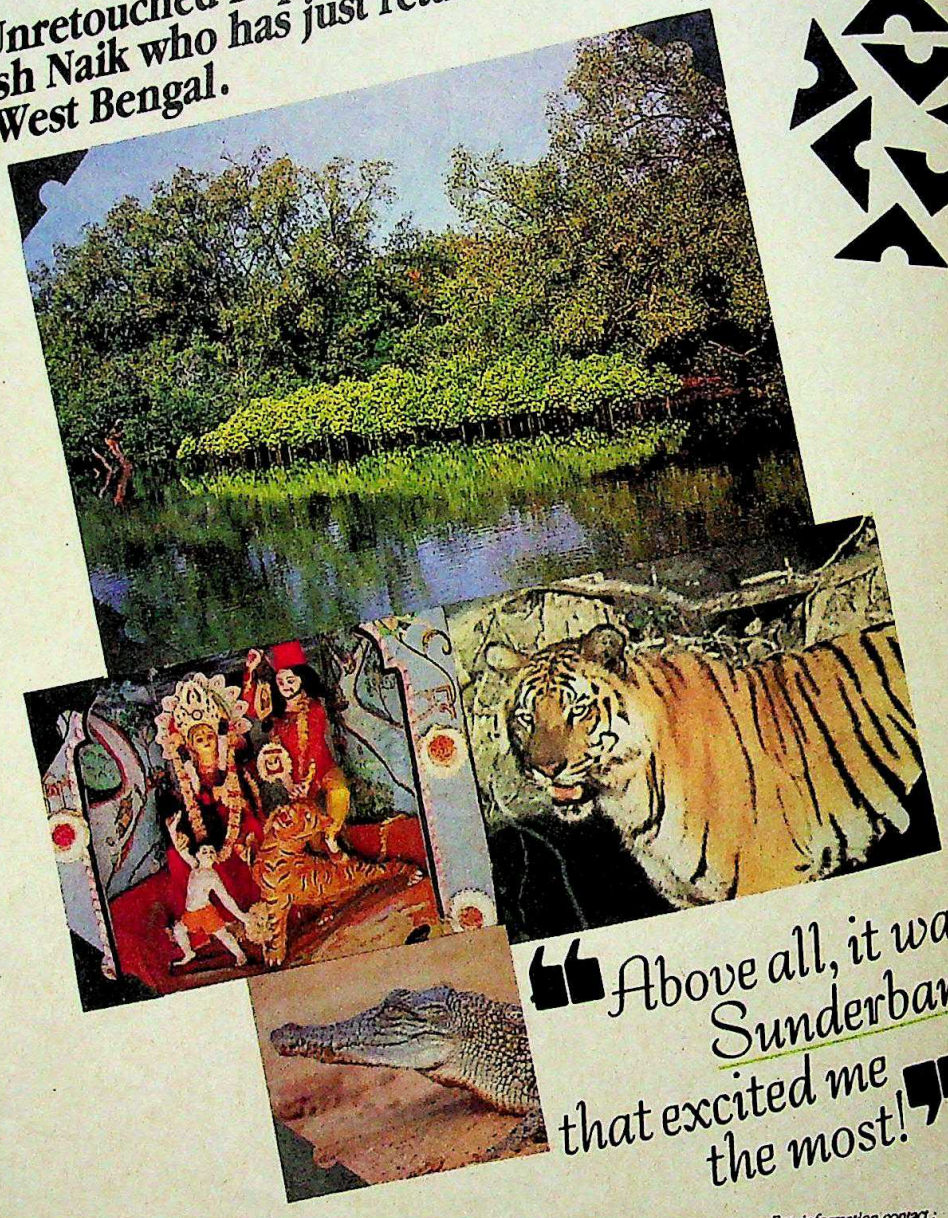
Unretouched impressions of Rakesh Naik who has just returned from West Bengal.



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Second Prize : 4 days, 3 nights stay at Sunderbans for two. Free transportation from Calcutta.

Third Prize : 3 days, 2 nights stay for two at Santiniketan. Free transportation from Calcutta.

Rush your entries on a 7 x 9 inches format to The Director of Tourism, Govt. of West Bengal, 2 Brabourne Road, Calcutta-700 001, by 15th April, 1989.

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Calcutta 700 001
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P.T. USHA

Idol Bashing Time

Fighting the nightmare of the Seoul fiasco

IN an era of instant megastardom failure is a crime. At Seoul this year, on a dismal September day, P.T. Usha, 24, failed.

The venom of a disappointed nation is not lost on her. Back in her native village Payyoli, 42 km from Calicut, again treading the sandy beaches that honed those golden legs, she is decided about her athletic future. "I will retire after the 1989 Asian Track and Field meet in New Delhi with some medals to silence my critics. I have no intention of taking part in the 1990 Beijing Asiad." she declares, disenchanted.

The statement could mean a lot. Even in gold medal terms—the very terms which led to the damning of Usha. For despite her Olympic nadir—mainly precipitated by an injured heel—she remains India's best bet for two to three individual golds in 1990. But then for India's myopic sports managers, two years is a very long way off, and no one at the moment appears to be turning a hair over the possibility of premature retirement by the best athlete, male or female, the country has ever produced.

Usha, of course, still smarting at the witch-hunt, would like nothing better than a long lay-off from sports, so she could try and forget the nightmare of Seoul. She still works out every morning for two hours on the beaches but spends the rest of her time watching video. She is also learning to drive. "I would love to drive the Standard 2000 and the Maruti presented to me," says she. "I want a driver's licence."

The licence will soon come, but it will be some time before the controversies that have mired her post-Seoul are dispelled. Heading the list is the long-standing question of her coach and mentor, O. Madhavan Nambiar, 51. Pressure is building up on her, from colleagues and the public, to part professionally from Nambiar. Among other things, there was graffiti smeared in Payyoli, criticising her association with Nambiar. An angry mob almost lynched the coach. And former ace long jumper Suresh Babu, wrote a cover story in the highly respected *Kalakaumudi* weekly blaming Nambiar for Usha's troubles asserting that "Usha still has a future provided she is taken away from Nambiar's clutches."

But Usha's commitment to Nambiar is total. Sobbing at allegations that Nambiar is ruining her career, she says: "Nobody can take away my coach from me. He is the man who made me." And Nambiar has no intentions of divesting himself of his charge. At Usha's house, he protested: "Everybody wants my head on a platter after Seoul, but I am not bothered." Piqued by the allegations that he has also been making money out of Usha's achievements he says: "I may definitely have got some trinkets, but I have never made money out of her. We have a father-daughter relationship. People are jealous."

Still, there is a strong belief in sports circles that had Usha undergone training abroad under a foreign coach, the results would have been much better. The Kerala Sports Council is now trying to transfer Nambiar from the post of Usha's personal coach.

Nambiar is, however, not the only issue dogging her. She has been unwittingly drawn into a slanging match with Sunil Gavaskar and Bishen Singh Bedi, courtesy the indiscreet potshots taken at them by the Delhi-based ghost-writer of her syndicated column. Says the anguished athlete: "I had specifically told my ghost-writer not to write in my name after Seoul, but he has gone and blasted Gavaskar and Bedi." The former cricketers hit back in their columns showing up Usha as a cry-baby. Usha is humble and apologetic about it: "I am a poor country girl with hardly any knowledge of cricket. I have sent apologies to Gavaskar and Bedi."

> "I will retire after the 1989 Asian Track and Field meet. I have no intention of taking part in the 1990 Asiad."
> P.T. USHA

What now is to become of the ace athlete? Is Seoul to mark curtains for her? The nation's apathy is apparent in more than idol-bashing: no attention is being paid to the injured heel that took the bottom off her career. Instead of being treated at the best medical centres in the country and abroad, Usha is undergoing homoeopathic treatment from Dr Abdul Azeez of Cannanore. Her father, meanwhile, is looking for a groom worthy of her.

But for Usha, depressed about the medal she'll never win, troubled by an injured ankle, fatally bound to Nambiar, and written off prematurely by a callous sports management and a whimsical public, it appears to be the end of success street. India could just as well start casting around for a new idol to build and break. —SREEDHAR PILLAI in Payyoli

Usha with Nambiar: lasting loyalty

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ATOMIC ENERGY

A Nuclear Bear Hug

A Soviet tie-up creates fission among Indian Scientists

AFTER the Russian ballet dancers took India by storm, it is now their scientists' turn: With 2000 megawatts of nuclear power. The Soviet deal, signed last fortnight, is the largest and perhaps most controversial project in the country's four-decade-old atomic energy programme. It has already triggered off a chain of dissenting reactions among nuclear scientists.

On the face of it, however, everything looks *khorosho*. The Soviets have agreed to set up, on a turnkey basis, two giant nuclear power stations each of 1000 megawatts. They are extending soft credit to the tune of 3.2 billion roubles (Rs 7,000 crore). And they have solved the vexatious issue of international safeguards by agreeing to take back spent nuclear fuel.

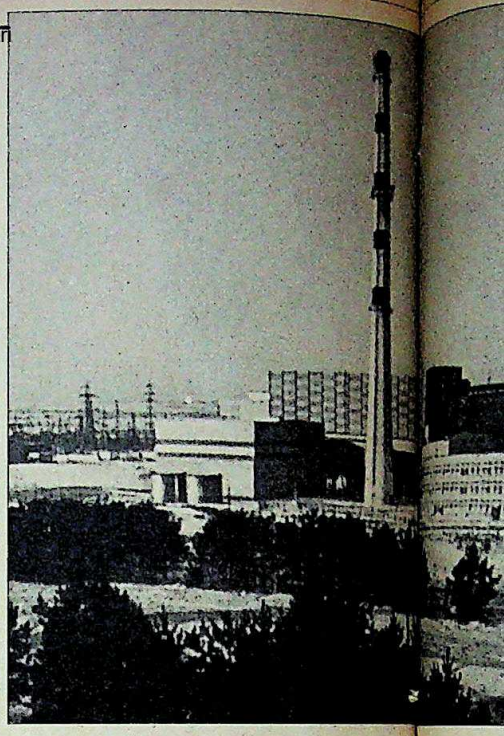
But the Russian agreement represents a major shift in the country's 'made-in-India' nuclear programme. After having scalded its fingers with initial tie-ups with the US and Canada, India had doggedly built up, in the past two decades, the much coveted capability of designing, constructing and running its own nuclear plants.

The fear among nuclear scientists now is that the tango with the Soviets may change that ball game dramatically. In its hunger for power, the country has allowed the Soviets to get, as a senior scientist put it, "a finger into our nuclear pie." Their doubts were fuelled by reports that the Government was considering a French proposal to set up a similar nuclear plant. One nuclear expert even felt that "the floodgates are being opened and our own indigenous programme would soon be swamped."

There were rumblings too that the proposed Soviet nuclear plants used a radically different technology than what India has developed (*see chart*). The feeling was that the mix of technologies would produce more fission than fusion in the country's atomic energy programme. And that manpower and money, vital for the country's own nuclear projects, would be diverted to run the Soviet plants. Official reaction was, however, guarded and even supportive of the deal. "We have already achieved the degree of self-reliance in nuclear power that we are looking for and we are certainly not giving that up," clarifies Dr M.R. Srinivasan, chairman, Atomic Energy Commission. To him the key question is how to solve the country's acute power shortage. There are worrying projections by the Central Electricity Authority that the current shortage of 20 per cent of peak power demand will continue up to 1995. And there is a serious resource crunch. As Union Power Secretary S. Rajgopal says: "The Government's top priority is to get power quickly and cheaply."

In that context, the Soviet offer, which included an agreement to provide credit and technical assistance for thermal and hydro-electric projects totalling 6000 megawatts, is attractive. And in the case of the nuclear tie-up, as Srinivasan points out: "The Soviets are offering top-of-the-drawer technology on credit at a low rate of interest. And the safeguards condition is worked out in a manner that does not affect our nuclear independence. On the whole, it is a good proposal."

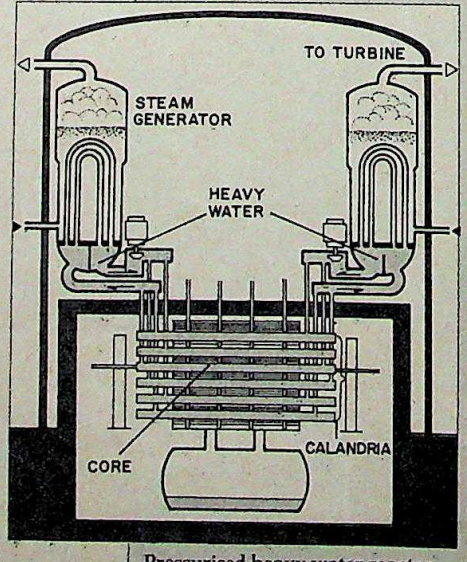
To allay fears that India was "selling out" to the Russians, four months before



NUCLEAR POWER

Nuclear power reactors utilise the energy released from fissioning uranium atoms to boil water. The steam produced is used to turn turbines that generate electricity. The key elements are: fuel (usually pellets of uranium dioxide

Diagrams by B.K. SHARMA



Pressurised heavy water reactor

THE INDIAN WAY

Fuel
Natural uranium containing 0.7 % of U 235, its fissile isotope, is mined and processed.

Reactor Core
Clusters of pencil-shaped fuel rods are loaded into pressure tubes in a vessel called calandria.

Moderator
Heavy water in a separate circuit is used to slow down neutrons.

Coolant
Heavy water is used to absorb the heat generated during fission and transfer it to steam generators.

Containment:
Double concrete dome enclosures.

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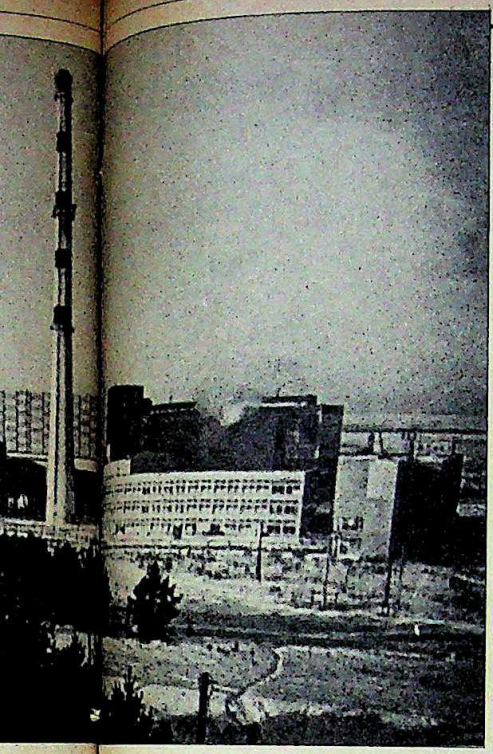

A Soviet nuclear plant: controversial deal

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the deal was finalised, the Union Cabinet cleared the setting up of 10 indigenous nuclear power reactors. The new projects, to be ready by 1999, in all would generate around 4,000 megawatts and, at current prices, is expected to cost about Rs 10,000 crore. The Government further reiterated that it expected indigenous nuclear power generation to reach the targeted 10,000 megawatts by 2001 from its current production of 1,300 megawatts. (The country's six nuclear power plants now generate 2.5 per cent of electricity and is expected to reach 10 per cent by 2001).

That commitment shut down, for the moment, the fission building up among nuclear scientists over the Soviet tie-up. "With the Government's promise on the 10,000 megawatt indigenous programme, our own efforts are not likely to be diluted," says Dr P.K. Iyengar, director, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Bombay. Iyengar, however, cautions that the Soviet project should be managed on what he terms "an islanding concept" to ensure that there is not much diversion of manpower and the country's own research and development projects are not affected.

That is also the fear of the country's expanding nuclear industries. With several of the key equipment being manufactured by such giants as Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Larsen and Toubro and Walchandnagar Industries, the industry's apprehension was that the Soviet contract may leave their own plants idle. Larsen and Toubro, which just commissioned a Rs 45-crore plant at Hazira in Gujarat to manufacture nuclear reactor equipment, is decidedly unhappy. Says A.M. Naik, Toubro's general manager: "The tie-up is discouraging for us. We fear that somewhere along the line they would take the soft option of importing plants and we would be robbed of our business."

However, S.L. Kati, the soft-spoken managing director of the Nuclear Power Corporation (NPC) sees no such problems. Says he: "We assure all those who are supporting the programme that there would be no cutbacks. Nor would we be diverting much manpower and resources to build the Soviet plants." But other engineers feel that the corporation is biting more than it can chew. Says one: "Our programme of 10,000 megawatts is too ambitious. We are unlikely to meet deadlines. We are still to prove whether we can run smaller plants and now we are to wrestle with a 1,000 megawatt animal."

There was even a feeling that the deal was an indication of the Central Government's growing impatience with the haphazard progress made by the country's nuclear establishment in generating power. And while ostensibly it was not curtailing its indigenous nuclear programme, the Government was throwing a challenge to scientists to pull up their bootstraps. As one nuclear scientist says: "It seems like a kind of perform or else threat."

Already there is some discreet but radical rethinking being done about the nuclear route India has been following. India's nuclear power plants are based on what is called pressurised heavy water reactor technology developed by the Canadians in which natural uranium is used as fuel. This kind of technology suits India, because its natural uranium ore reserves are limited.

The next generation of Indian nuclear plants, called fast breeder reactors, would run on plutonium got from spent fuel from the current reactors. In the final stage, it would have reactors based on the thorium-uranium cycle since India has abundant reserves of thorium.

The Indian experience with pressurised heavy water reactors has not been too happy. There have been worrying delays in both construction and commissioning of plants. While the first reactor at Kalpakkam was commissioned

ENERATION

oderator, a solid or liquid, to enable continuous fissioning of uranium; a lant, to absorb the heat generated during fission and transfer it to steam erators and controls systems to regulate the fission chain reaction.

THE SOVIET WAY*

Mined uranium is enriched to contain 3-5 % of U 235 before being loaded.

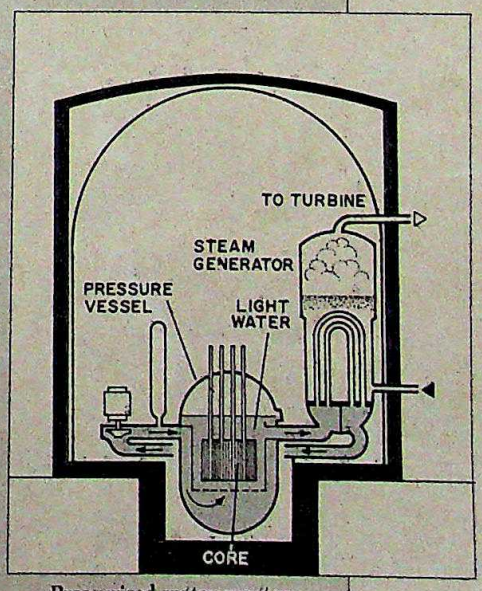
Fuel rods packed into a three-storey-high, steel pressure vessel.

Light water is used.

The same moderator water acts as a coolant.

1-2 thick concrete enclosure lined with steel.

*Reactors being sold to India



Pressurised water reactor

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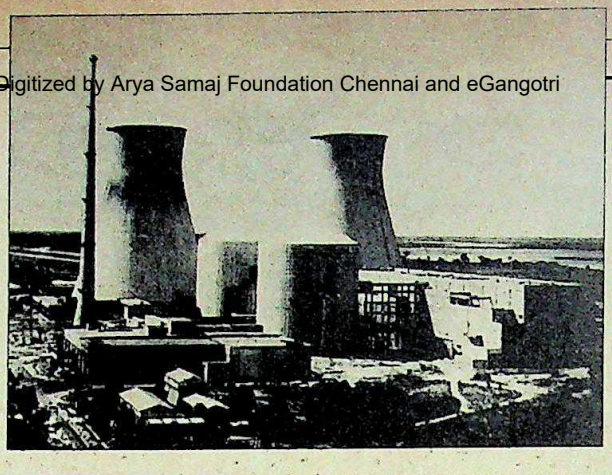

The Narora atomic power station

eight years late, Narora, the newest reactor, has already slipped by six years. The reactor running capacity of between 50 and 60 per cent is one of the lowest for this type in the world. But as Kati explains: "When we began we were at the bottom of the learning curve and now things have speeded up considerably. We don't expect such delays."

Since only 10 per cent of the nuclear power plants the world over are based on the heavy water reactors that India uses, there is a feeling that its technological development was peaking. Also the uranium ore scenario has changed dramatically recently with more abundant reserves being discovered in several other countries. And far from rising, which was the earlier fear, uranium ore prices have stabilised to a viable level.

It is in this context that the Soviet deal assumes significance. The reactors that the Soviets are selling are based on pressure water reactor technology, something that around 60 per cent of the nuclear plants in the world run on. The fuel used is enriched uranium (a technology India doesn't have). The discovery of more uranium reserves makes such reactors economically viable. As Professor A.K. De, chairman, Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, says: "We should not shut the doors on other kinds of technology. Because if our current technology reaches its peak we should be in a position to jettison it and slowly switch to more viable options. And that's where the Soviet plants would help."

Such talk would have been blasphemy a couple of years ago, but there is growing pragmatism among the country's nuclear scientists themselves. The problems of India's nuclear route have not yet been ironed out. While some success has been achieved in the fast-breeder reactor technology that would dominate India's second generation of reactors, it is still to be proved on the ground. And even in the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research, where the fast breeder technology is being developed, there is cautious acceptance. As C.V. Sundaram, director of the centre, says: "A one-time buy of such reactors opens up another technological option which we can tap if we discover more uranium reserves."

While there are plus sides to the Soviet deal, there are many more minuses too. After their bitter experience with western nuclear powers, India has always been chary of depending on another country to supply fuel to run its plants. And while the Soviets have assured India that they were even willing to supply the fuel for 30 years (an economically unviable proposition for the country) the international political scenario may change and India could be left high and dry again.

Scientists also perceive the ease with which the International Atomic Energy Agency agreed to India's terms for "limited safeguards" as an indication of the new game being played by the nuclear superpowers to hawk their technology. For the Soviets the deal has been a coup of sorts. Till recently the Indian response had been lukewarm. Several top Indian scientists, including former chairman Dr Raja Ramanna, were against it because they feared it would undermine India's self-reliance in the nuclear programme. The Russians are now strutting around proudly in the exclusive nuclear power club and hoping to induce many third world countries to buy their reactors.

Many other questions hound the Soviet proposal. The cost of setting up such reactors have still not been worked out. This would be ready only when the detailed project report is made, and then only would it be known if these are viable.

Meanwhile there is trouble of another kind. An agitation is building up against the choice of Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu as the site for a new reactor. Already several eminent citizens have teamed up to protest against the "1,000 megawatt time bomb" that is ticking away in the neighbourhood. Dr Srinivasan maintains it is the best site and that there is no need to fear about safety. Moreover, as he points out, the southern states are acutely short of electricity and the new power projects would help.

Homi Bhabha, the founder of India's nuclear programme, once remarked, "There is no power costlier than no power." Whether Soviet power will prove costlier than no power is the big question.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Bombay with AMARNATH K. MENON in Madras

"We should ensure that there is not much diversion of our resources for the Soviet project."

DR P.K. IYENGAR
director, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre

"We have already achieved the degree of self reliance and we are not giving that up."

DR M.R. SRINIVASAN
chairman, Atomic Energy Commission

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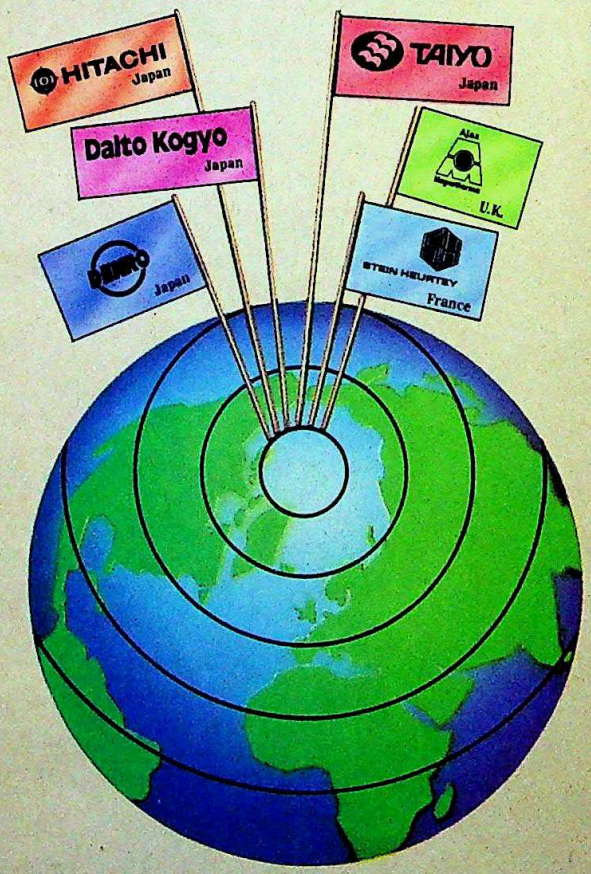

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AAMIR KHAN

Teenybopper Heart-throb

Young fans go into raptures over a new star

YOU reveal your age by whether you like Aamir Khan or not. If you're under 20, you love him. If you're over 20, you wonder what the oohs and aahs are all about. Ever since *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* was released, Aamir Khan, 23, has become something of a teenage phenomenon, the dreamboat of a new generation, to whom Amitabh Bachchan is, well, more like dad.

Aamir is one of them. He wears the same blue jeans, he listens to the same music, he even looks a bit like the yuppie American hero Michael J. Fox. He is a little bundle of energy but with a soft, dreamy look that makes you want to ruffle his hair. Aamir Khan is in fact the cute guy next door who gives a blushing 14-year-old schoolgirl her first kiss.

It is the same sort of magic that Rishi Kapoor—with his innocent smile—once worked in *Bobby*. Several young girls have seen *Qayamat* over 50 times. One sees the film every night on the video and each time Aamir appears, she murmurs, "*Sona baba*". In another girl's room, the Disney posters disappeared overnight and life-size ones of Aamir Khan came up instead. "He's so sweet," she giggles. "Just like a baby."

And recently, when he was staying in a Delhi hotel, two dozen schoolgirls, all dressed up in sarees, spent the entire day roaming the floors of the hotel hoping to catch him somewhere. "He looks gentle," says Aditya Bhattacharya who has directed him in *Raakh*. "He's the kind of guy you'd like to take home to mother."

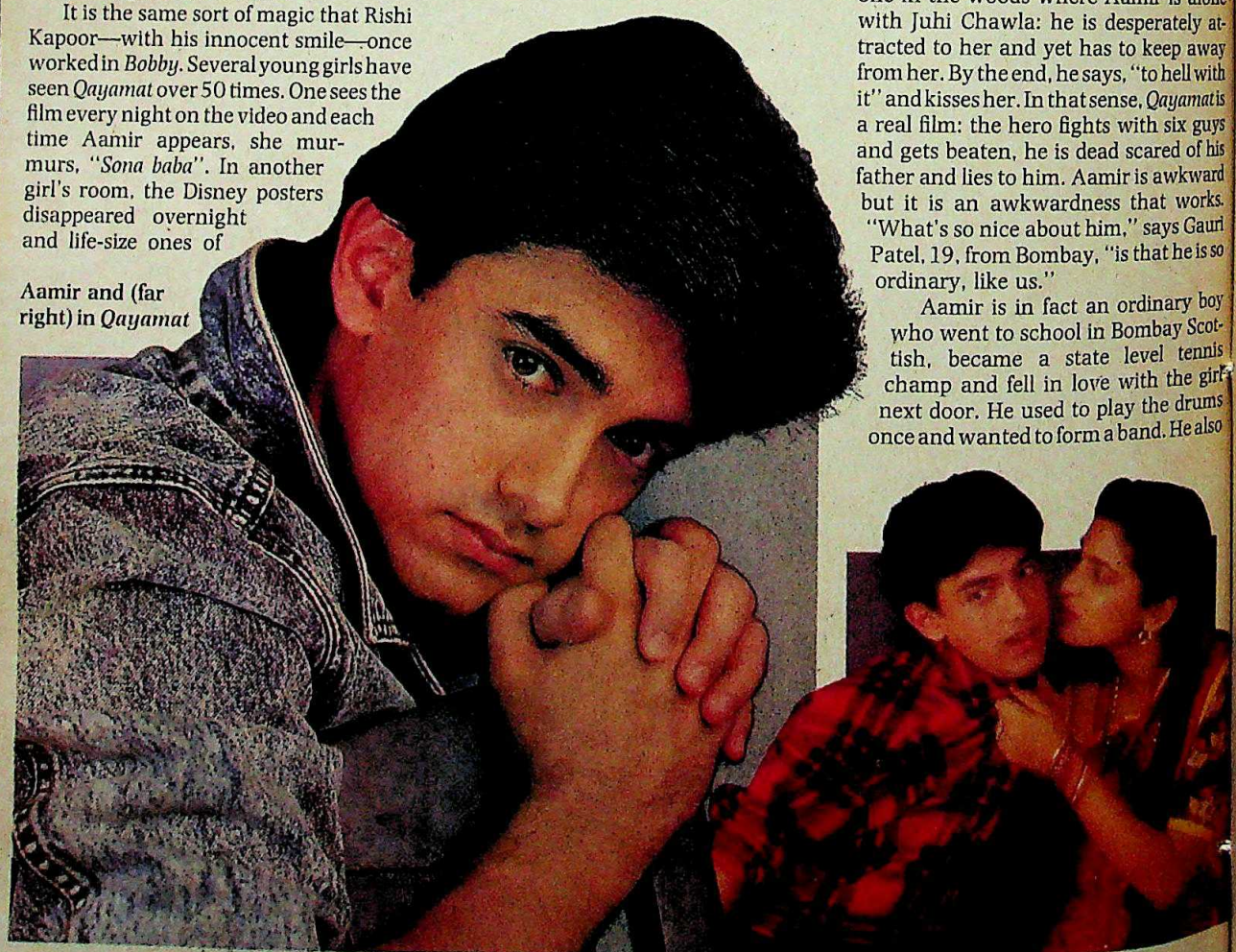
Life hasn't been easy for Aamir after stardom. While trying to take an auto-rickshaw once, he got abducted by a carful of excited kids. Another time a young girl wrote him a love letter in blood which had him in complete panic. And one morning, 70 ticket stubs of *Qayamat* arrived from a fan in Vilaspur who had created a local record by seeing the film so often. "All this is very heady," says Aamir. "But I feel bad that I can no longer take my wife for a walk on the beach."

Qayamat's success has surprised everyone, most of all director Mansoor Khan, an MIT engineering student, who made the film for a lark. "Indians are used to loud, overdone things," he says. "Here I was giving them a souffle." But the souffle rose and rose—and turned into the biggest hit of the year, slated to gross Rs 5 crore.

It is a sweet enough film about two young lovers caught between warring families. It has an elfin charm but put against classics like *Devadas* and *Pyaasa*, *Qayamat* would pale. Still, in times when there are no hits, *Qayamat* is a big one. Film director Shekhar Kapur analyses its success: "Every 10 years, the audience says, 'Hey, I've changed.' Aamir has swept a whole new generation, just the way Zeenat Aman once did."

In a way *Qayamat* has become a cult film, with kids having seen certain scenes over 100 times. Like the cutely passionate one in the woods where Aamir is alone with Juhi Chawla: he is desperately attracted to her and yet has to keep away from her. By the end, he says, "to hell with it" and kisses her. In that sense, *Qayamat* is a real film: the hero fights with six guys and gets beaten, he is dead scared of his father and lies to him. Aamir is awkward but it is an awkwardness that works. "What's so nice about him," says Gauri Patel, 19, from Bombay, "is that he is so ordinary, like us."

Aamir is in fact an ordinary boy who went to school in Bombay Scottish, became a state level tennis champ and fell in love with the girl next door. He used to play the drums once and wanted to form a band. He also



Aamir and (far right) in *Qayamat*

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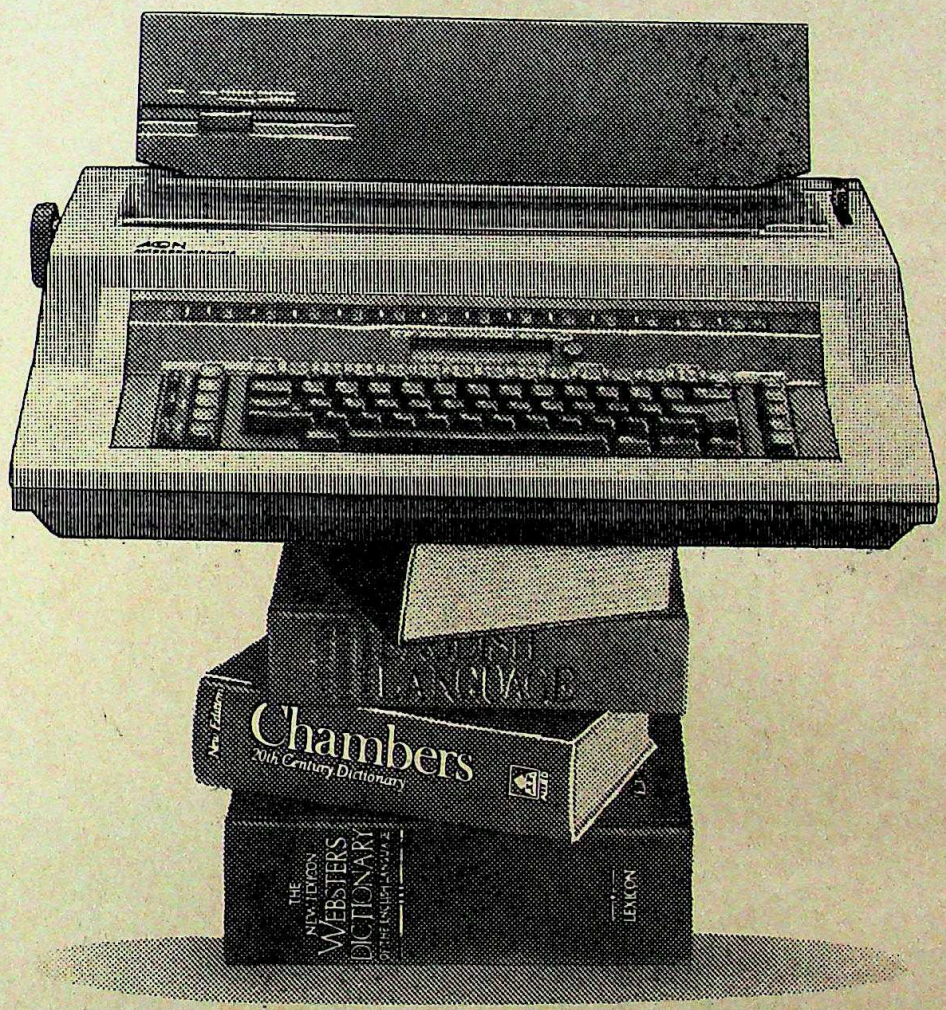

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did a small but powerful role—with his head shaved—in Ketan Mehta's *Holi*. One day his uncle Nasir Husain noticed him. "I wanted to do a love story," says Nasir, *Qayamat*'s producer. "Aamir was sweet-looking and so I gave him a screen test."

Now Aamir is stunned by his success and doesn't quite know what to do with his fans, mostly giddy schoolgirls who get dumbstruck when they see him. His servants have become the star servants in the colony and keep bringing autograph books for 'Aamir baba' to sign. He lives in a simple, non-filmi house—where little girls keep peeping in through the windows. "They don't know what to say to me, they're embarrassed," he says blushing. "And I don't know what to do with them, I'm embarrassed."

What makes him tick ? The film industry is crawling with young heroes, all melting into each other against a backdrop of leather, mobikes and discotheques. Against this, Aamir stands out as an innocent. He is just what everyone else is not: simply, a nice kind of a guy. Says Bhattacharya: "In this world that is getting increasingly dumb macho, you can look into Aamir's eyes and feel good. His success is one of goodness."

In *Raakh*, Aamir has to hold Supriya Pathak in an adult, intimate scene. Bhattacharya remembers how Aamir was all flushed and red in the face. "It was both, funny and sweet at the same time," he says. "It was a very innocent way of reacting to holding a woman." Innocence is especially sensual when everyone is trying to be Rambo.

What makes Aamir Khan stand out from the pack is his innocence. He is what everyone else is not: simply, a nice kind of a guy.

Another thing Aamir manages to convey is love. "For the first time, after *Bobby*, I sensed real love in a film," says Kapur. Aamir is cast not from the fiery mould of Vinod Khanna and Dharmendra but made of a soft, romantic clay with a particularly appealing dimple in his cheek. However, for the older viewer who has grown up with Bachchan and Khanna, brand loyalties don't change so fast. Ultimately Aamir will have to prove that he can act as well.

His next film *Raakh* is a surrealist, unglamorous film, where he plays a young boy who turns into a killer after his girl-friend gets raped. He is also working in Shekhar Kapur's *Time Machine*, a snappy, fantasy film based on *Back to the Future*. (Aamir apparently burst into tears when he got the role). "He's a fresh wave in the industry," says Dev Anand who is directing him in *Awwal Number*, a film on cricket. "But it takes a lot of hits to dig yourself in the hearts of the people."

Today Aamir's life is the stuff dreams are made of. The offers are rolling in, he commands an amazing Rs 10 lakh per film—and in a world where love dies fast, he is completely obsessed by his wife Reena, a simple girl in a salwar-kameez and plait who used to live next door. Theirs in fact was a window-to-window romance and Aamir proposed to her the day he turned 21.

Reena works in a travel agency where she commutes by bus and has not let on that she is the wife of Aamir Khan. "It's her decision," he says admiringly. "But I'd prefer her to work. If she's not financially independent, then the relationship is a little unfair."

During *Qayamat*, Juhi Chawla remembers that he would write to her every day. One night, he called her from Ooty and she wasn't at home. He couldn't find her anywhere. Outside, the unit was waiting in cars to leave for Bangalore. But Aamir Khan wouldn't go. "He was so worried, he had tears in his eyes," says Juhi.

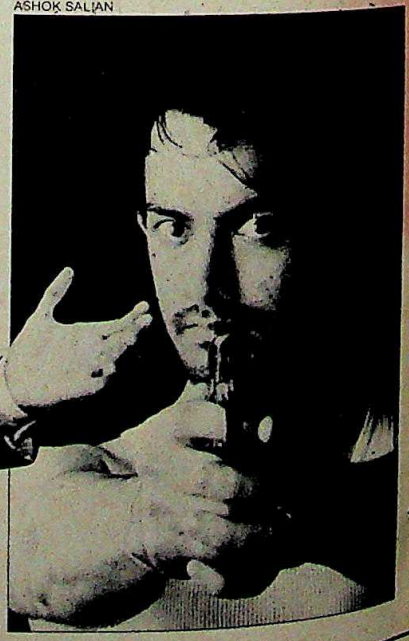
He is, as another actress admitted, irritatingly immune to other girls' charms. Reena, in fact, has a bit role in *Qayamat*. "She wore a red dress," says Aamir, adding softly, "She looked lovely." The ultimate image of the couple is that of two kids caught in a formal cocktail party when they'd rather be playing "What's the Good Word ?"

Aamir Khan is really just a kid at heart, longing for the days when he played cricket in the neighbourhood. Juhi, who is co-starring with him in four films, says working with him was like doing a schoolplay. During rainy evenings in Ooty, the crew would huddle in cars where Aamir would keep them entertained for hours with stories of old films. "He was so good, he could comfort a little child to sleep," says Juhi.

But Aamir is not in an enviable position today. That is the problem with such quick success. "People's expectations have risen so high, that no matter what I do they will be disappointed," he says. In a sense all he has to do is continue playing what the film industry so obviously lacks today: simply, a nice guy.

—SIMRAN BHARGAVA in Bombay

ASHOK SALIAN



Playing a cricketer in *Awwal Number*; and (far right) a killer in *Raakh*

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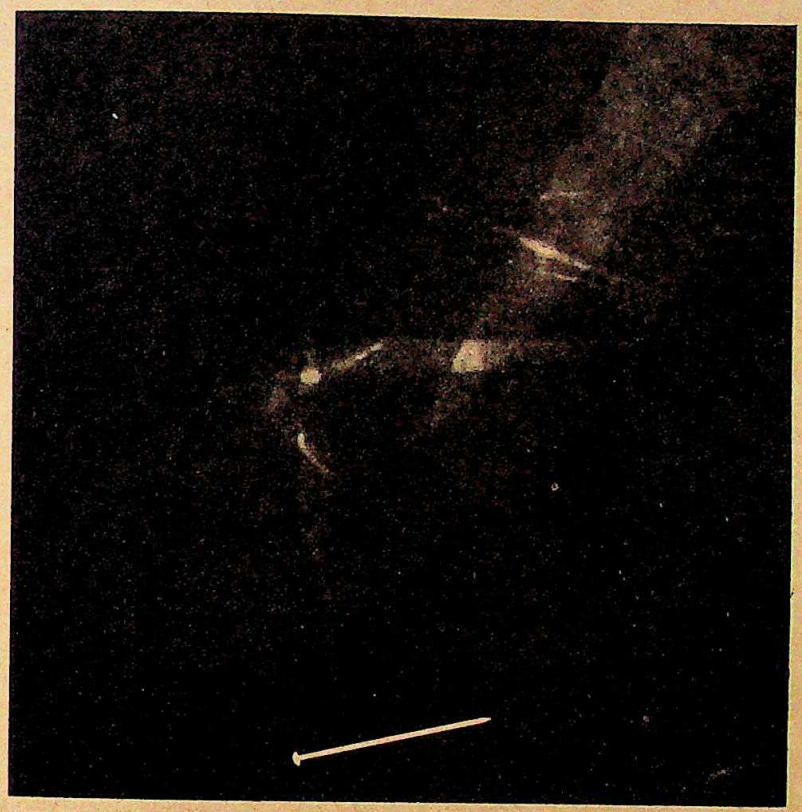

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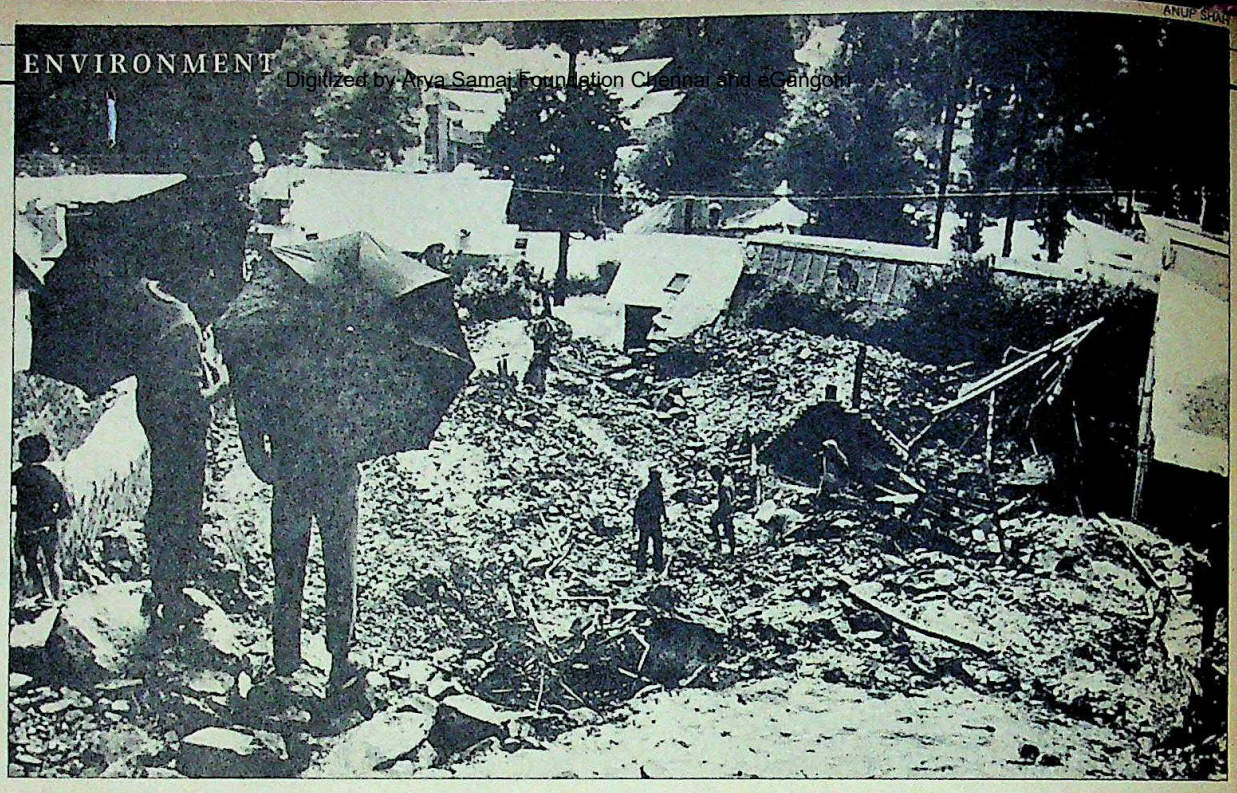

Clearing a landslide's debris

NAINITAL

Sliding Downhill

Construction boom causes landslides in the resort

IN Nainital (1939 metres), one of the country's most popular hill resorts, there is a steep climb up the *Sher-ka-danda* (Snow View) hill which leads to an old, almost abandoned church amidst thick forest. The church has an east window, a memorial built to the 151 persons who were buried alive in a devastating landslide in 1880. This was a forgotten memorial till a series of alarming landslides hit the town recently, reviving memories of the long-forgotten event; and suddenly bringing into question the future of this most picturesque of Indian hill towns.

Panic hit residents after a landslide from the Naina Peak (2610 metres) in July, when an estimated 50,000 cubic metres of rock and shale were displaced, destroying over a dozen houses, and reaching dangerously close to the heavily populated toe of the hill on the town's north-eastern side. With over 15,000 cubic metres of rubble still loosely resting on the catch walls (built to trap falling debris) in the hill's upper reaches, and with prospects of a heavy snowfall this winter, the situation is alarming.

Says Dr Ajay Singh Rawat, 38, head of the history department in the Kumaon University: "The hill is undoubtedly caving in." The infirmity of the hill has been established by various geologists. Rawat affirms that there is a crack—65 metres in length, 1.5 metres in breadth and 2.5 metres deep—on the south-west of the Naina ridge.

The first warnings came in September last year, when, following heavy rain, boulders slipped from the Naina ridge, uprooting 100 trees. A few months later, on March 11, another major landslip occurred after a sustained downpour, the rubble reaching populated areas.

But it were the landslides of July 4, 5 and 6 which did the most damage. On July 6, boulders, shale and rubble bombarded the Melrose and Brookehill areas at 6.30 a.m. and damaged 61 buildings, affecting 470 families. Worst hit were the Brookehill students' hostel of Kumaon University and the Swiss Hotel—some outhouses were completely wrecked.

Kumaon University had received a warning during the March landslip, when the boys had a providential escape. Says M.G. Goswami, the students union president: "As most of us were studying for the exams, we were awake and came out of the hostels after hearing boulders falling." Soon after they rushed out, one barrack was buried in rubble. Says hostel warden J.C. Joshi: "Luckily the boys weren't in the rooms during the March and July landslides or else there would have been a tragedy. If landslides are repeated during the snowfall this winter, it will be a critical situation."

Already Nainital—whose economy is essentially sustained by tourism—has begun to worry. Says Sher Singh, a candle dealer of the town: "I can positively assert that our sales during puja season this year were at least 20 per cent less than last." Sandip Mazumdar, a management executive from Calcutta, gives substance to this apprehension. Alongwith his family, he visited Nainital this summer, and then again came up on work last month. But this time his wife refused to accompany him. He says: "Her first reaction was she did not want to get buried in a landslide." Things might not be so threatening yet, but if the authorities do not provide an assuring protective mechanism, tourism is bound to get badly hit.

The 1880 landslip provides an ominous backdrop to the current threat. The famous flats (playground) in the heart of Nainital were laid out after the Snow View Hill landslide, when rubble filled up a corner of the lake. Snow View Hill, which houses 50-odd hotels and most of

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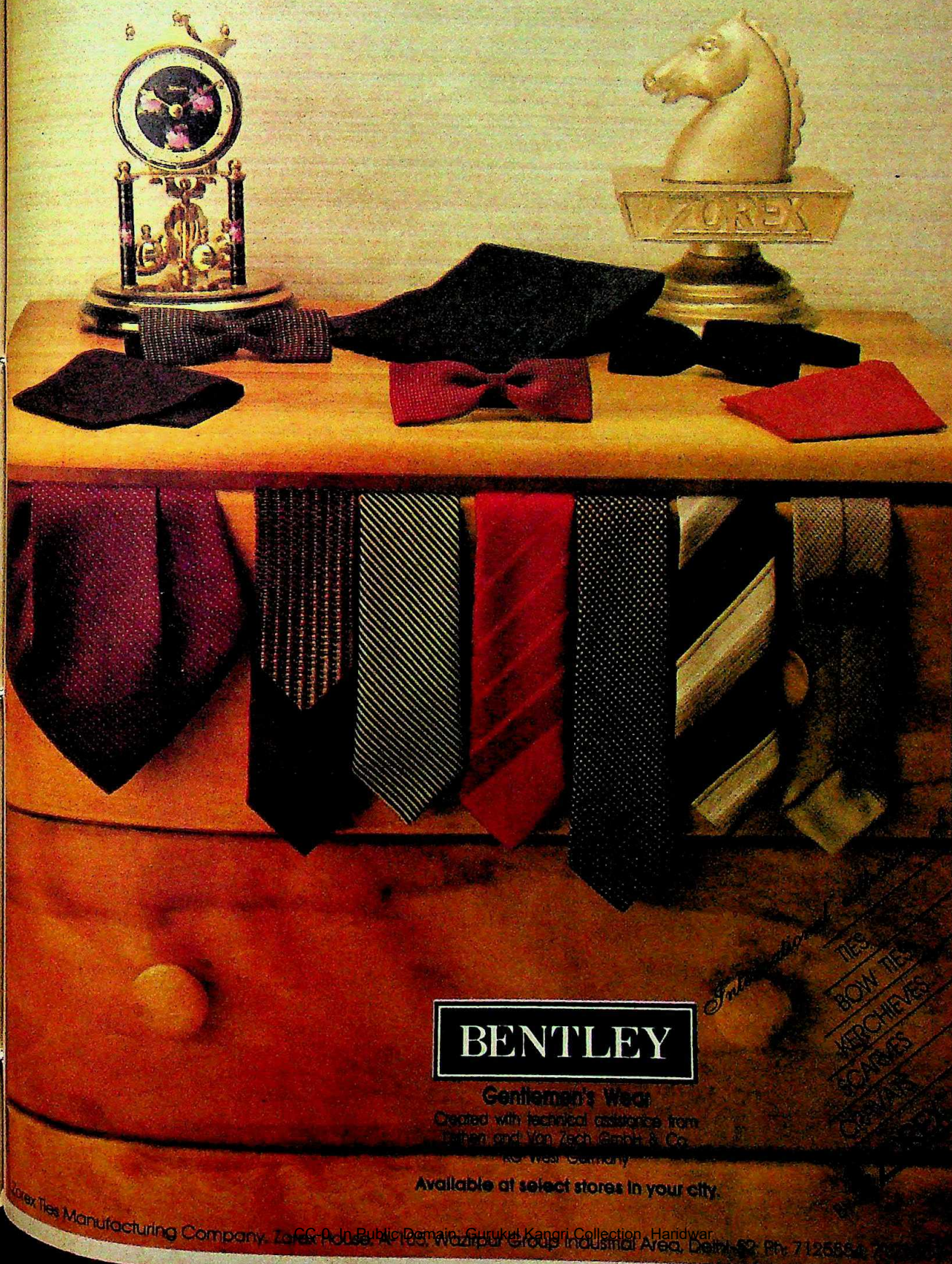

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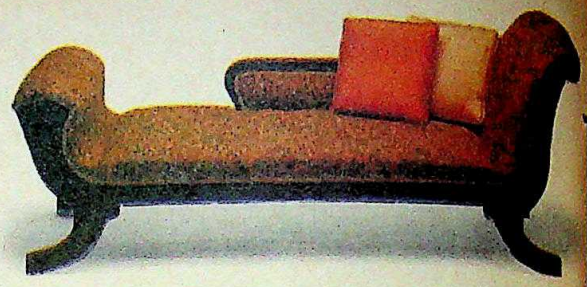

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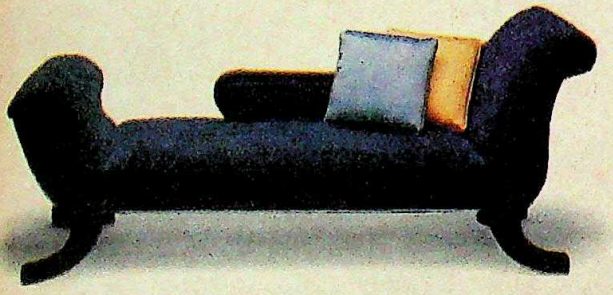

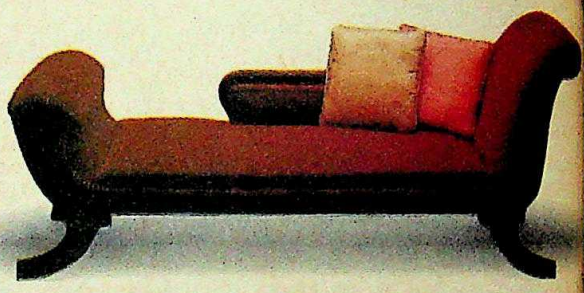

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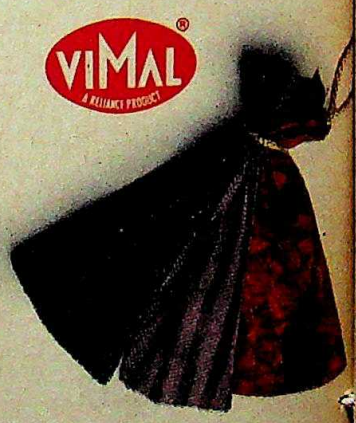

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Nainital's famous public schools is still reckoned to be fragile. Authorities however contend that anchoring operations during the installation of the ropeway in 1986 have firmed the hill. But with the fear of Naina Hill mounting, that of the fragility of Snow View has returned too.

A lack of foresight on the part of the Government and the local administration besides geological factors are responsible for the present crisis. Always fragile, the Naina Hill was firmed up by the British who undertook large-scale preventive efforts, including afforestation. Catch walls were built in the upper toe region of the hills around Nainital and a network of 71 drains, 56 km in length, were built in the lower hills to channelise rain water into the lake.The records from 1911 to 1930 refer to the upkeeping of this network. And in 1930 a ban was imposed on construction on the Snow View and Naina Hills, which was extended in 1953.

But the lessons of the past were either forgotten or ignored by the time the 1970s came around, for construction resumed on Naina Hill as Nainital saw a boom in tourism and the local population increased from 25,000 in 1961 to over 50,000 today (plus a floating population of 1 lakh). After 1980, and especially since 1986, construction activity has grown at a maddening pace, with even multi-storeyed hotels springing up.

All norms have been either defied or circumvented. Officially, no building should exceed 25 ft in height but the Greater Nainital Development Authority (GNDA) has allowed construction up to 35 feet. In 1950, there were only two bungalows on Naina Hill, now there are at least 500 buildings.

That isn't all. The authorities have inadvertently added to the landslide danger. The building in 1976 of the Kilbury motor road in Naina Hill's Upper Mall region has been criticised as further endangering the already infirm hill. But Nainital Commissioner and GNDA Chairman O.N. Vaidya differs on this. Says he: "This argument has no sense as the 1880 landslide from Snow View Hill occurred without any blasting operations in that hill. This is a purely geological phenomenon."

The GNDA has, also, closed its eyes to the construction of at least 100 houses—which have come up without any sanction—in the most dangerous zone along the banks of drain number 26. Only after the September 1987 landslip did the district magistrate issue an order on December 30 banning construction. Despite this construction started on a dozen buildings. Says Vaidya: "We have declared the hill as a dangerous area. If illegal construction goes on, it is first of all at the owner's risk and secondly we have and will file criminal proceedings against them."

Two fissures in the Naina peak

The July landslides gave a clear indication that Naina Hill had started crumbling.

But things aren't so easily explained. Residents point to how a three-storeyed hotel was allowed to come up last year, even though the building was a concrete structure against the prescribed wooden. The GNDA itself is going ahead with a four-storeyed housing project near the Sherwani ridge on Naina Hill. Construction of another scheme of multi-storeyed private flats in Armadalre Compound has started since May and a multi-storeyed hotel is coming up near the Administrative Training Institute. These schemes have been sanctioned by the GNDA, though the hill has been a notified dangerous area since 1930.

The new District Magistrate P.D. Sudhakar realises the gravity of the situation. Says he: "We will stop illegal construction to let pressure off the unstable hill." District officials also claim that protective work has been carried out on Naina Hill. Three catch walls in three different layers have been reinforced in the Upper Mall area, the embankments of drain number 26 have been raised, and a wire-grill put on the drain's mouth. But on examination, it seems unlikely that the arrangements could deal with a major landslide. Admits M.J. Khan, assistant engineer of the PWD, who is in charge of the protection works: "These arrangements would give in if there is a major landslide."

As for permanent measures, Dr K.S. Waldia, head of the geology department of Kumaon University, who was requisitioned by the local administration to study the problem, suggested erecting a steel-cage on the lines of the one built on the "Khooninullah" of the Srinagar-Jammu highway and asphalt spraying on the hill top and other affected areas to seal joints. And the Geological Survey of India's expert Gyaneshwar Pant recommended rock bolting and anchoring of the hill. Says Vaidya: "Any such long-term project would not only take time but will cost several crores of rupees. We are exploring projects which are low cost and can yield the desired results."

The moot question is however raised by Dr Madhu Nayal, a lecturer in Kumaon University who asks agitatedly: "But will we live to see them?"

Nainital is indeed living dangerously. Sudhakar admits that the snowfall—the forecast is heavy—this winter and next year's monsoon will almost certainly test the stability of Naina Hill. Not only that. More crucially, it will put to the test the survival of an idyllic hill resort.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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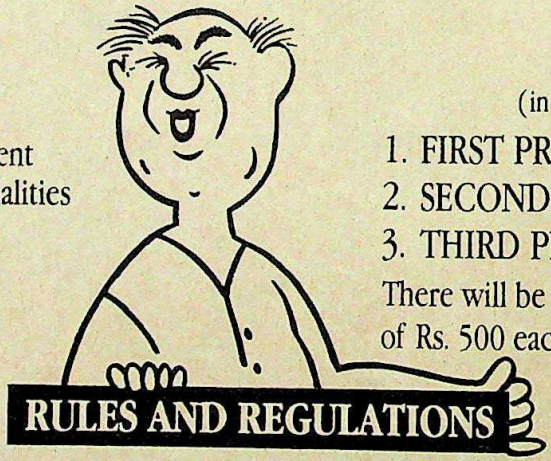

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9. The results of the contest will be published in The Hindustan Times dated March 12, 1989 (Dak editions : March 13)

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FAMILY PLANNING

Inhuman Operation

Targets filled by tubectomising old Harijan women

QUOTAS and targets sought and achieved without the restraint of strict guidelines and a humanistic approach can create havoc. That truism has been harshly learnt by a group of ageing women in Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh. In typically callous bureaucratic fashion, seven women—all Harijans—were inveigled into getting themselves tubectomised with promises of incentives that were never kept. The cruelty assumes graver proportions when seen along with the fact that all seven of them were well past their menopausal stage.

This puts to shame the proud claims of the state Government that it had achieved 114 per cent of its sterilisation quota last year. In fact, it breeds a positive suspicion of all such target figures.

All seven of these women belong to Sokhna village (population: 3,000), about 5 km from Hathras town of Aligarh district. They are victims of a wonderfully convenient bureaucratic brain-wave linking the Indira Awas Yojana (a subsidised housing scheme for Harijans) to the family planning programme so that sterilisation quotas can be easily achieved. The women were coaxed to go in for tubectomies at the local primary health centre (PHC) with the lure of money to build houses in their village. While four got only half the money due to them, the other three are still awaiting their incentive.

Interviews with the victims—Kalawati, 53, Asharfi Devi, 55, Kasturi Devi, 56, Bhagwan Devi, 60, Lilawati, 62, Pancho, 65, and Rajjo Devi, 70—and the details provided in their family planning identity cards, reveal the cruel joke perpetrated on them. All were victims of the fact that the district officials had to complete their quotas while those stationed at Hathras wished to show results and, in the process, earn some money too.

What they needed for the purpose was a couple of influential residents who would act as promoters. In Sokhna, two were readily available: Dr Babu Lal and Dr M.R. Nirmal. And, by virtue of being doctors (homoeopathic), they enjoyed the complete confidence of the villagers. In March 1986, working in league with the local block development officer and the medics of the Maho PHC in Hathras, the two village doctors coaxed the seven women to undergo tubectomy if they wanted to get Rs 6,000 each for building a one-room house in the village under the Indira Awas Yojana.

Bhagwan Devi, wife of Ganeshi Lal, was the first victim. She was operated upon in Bagla Hospital in Hathras on March 5. "I fell sick and remained hospitalised for a month," recalls Bhagwan Devi. "Even today I'm not able to walk straight. They have turned me into a worthless woman." Lamenting that she could no longer contribute to the family income—she earlier earned Rs 10 a day as a labourer—Bhagwan Devi asserts that it was Dr Babu Lal who coerced her to go in for the operation. She says that of the Rs 6,000 due to her, she got only Rs 3,000. "We had to spend Rs 1,000 from our own pocket to complete the house. All those people who took me for the operation kept the rest of the money and in return they have made my life hell," says Bhagwan Devi. As proof of the officials' devious intentions, her identity card (number 352/12), issued by the Maho PHC and signed by the doctor-in-charge, has its age column left blank.

Harijan women who had passed the menopausal stage were coaxed to go in for sterilisation with the lure of money.

The case of Kasturi Devi is yet more traumatic. A widow—her husband Tej Singh died in 1982—she disclosed that Dr Babu Lal persuaded her to undergo a sterilisation operation in order to acquire a house in the village. She was operated upon on March 7 and, in a case of the worst possible cheating, was registered under the name of Sridevi, wife of Param Sukh of Noorpur village, also in the Hathras block. Says Kasturi: "I was ill for more than a month and stayed in the hospital during this period. They kept telling me that I would be issued an identity card soon, but it was never done. I spent over Rs 500 on my treatment and medicine after the operation and did not get a single rupee, leave alone the amount promised for the house." Dr Babu Lal, who was present throughout the interview with Kasturi, admitted that she was telling the truth and that the certificate for Kasturi's operation had been issued to Sridevi, who had then received the house due to the former. Providing a clue to the widespread nature of the racket, the doctor said indignantly: "These things keep happening every other day in our villages. Why do you bother?"

Then, as if to provide justification for the fraud, Dr Babu Lal went on to narrate other similar cases promoted by Dr Nirmal, quite obviously his rival in the village. The case of Rajjo Devi, wife of Babu Lal, is attributed to

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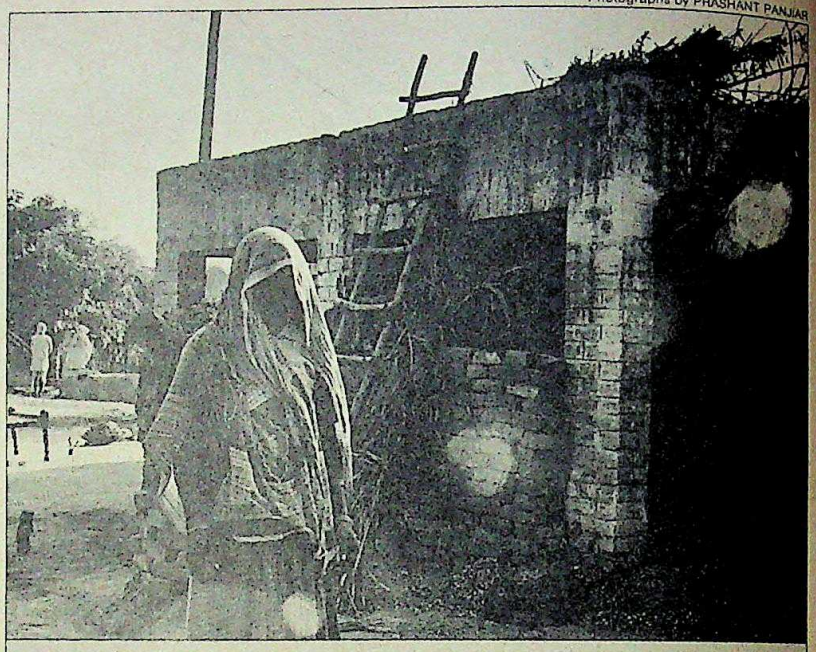
Dr Nirmal, who too made it a point to be present when INDIA TODAY spoke to the victims. Rajjo Devi's youngest son was 15 years old while the elder two were married when she was persuaded to undergo tubectomy on March 31. As with Bhagwan Devi, Rajjo's identity card (number 355/14), issued after the operation by the Maho PHC, also had a blank age column. Laments the old lady: "I have got a house but the operation has turned me into a physical wreck. They gave me only Rs 3,500 and we spent the rest ourselves to build the house."

Dr Nirmal admits that most of the women, including those promoted by Dr Babu Lal, received only about Rs 4,000 as against the due sum of Rs 6,000. "The sahibs shared the rest and gave us some," he explains.

Lilawati, wife of Param Singh, who owes her share of woes to Dr Babu Lal and was tubectomised on March 7 (identity card number 355/17), says: "I got Rs 3,000 and gave Rs 500 to Dr Babu Lal out of that. Who took away the remaining Rs 3,000, I can't say." She recalls the complications that developed after the operation. "I was in hospital for more than one-and-a-half months and was given glucose drip for days together. Even now I feel weak and can't work as a labourer any more," she says. Even as she was narrating her woes, both Dr Babu Lal and Dr Nirmal started arguing and blaming each other for promoting her case.

Photographs by PRASHANT PANJIAR



Lilawati, 62, who was operated on March 7, 1986 complains she got only Rs 3,000 as against the due sum of Rs 6,000. And due to post-operative complications, she can't work as a labourer now.

ASHARFI Devi's is another case of cruel deprivation. Tubectomised on March 31, she was issued identity card number 353/15 by the Maho PHC but has not got a house till date. Her husband, Om Prakash, claims they have repeatedly demanded the money from the local tehsildar who has assured them that they will get it soon. Complains Asharfi: "I was pestered to undergo sterilisation by Dr Nirmal, but after the operation he refused to help." The doctor in turn claims he has no idea why she has not been paid the money yet. According to him: "Such bunglings are done at the higher level. We are small-fries and cannot afford to do such injustice."

Another old widow sterilised in March 1986 was Pancho Devi. Her husband, Khacher Mal died in 1970, according to Mool Chand Nim, a Congress leader of Hathras. Nim—who had brought these cases to light at the state-level convention of the Uttar Pradesh Scheduled Castes and Tribes Vikas Parishad in Lucknow last month—told INDIA TODAY about Pancho Devi's case. (She was away to attend a relation's wedding.)

Despite the injustice, there is also fear. Kalawati Devi, whose youngest son is eight years old, refused to talk because of the presence of the two village doctors, the motivators, and the absence of her husband, Ram Dayal, who was away working in the fields. As with the others, Kalawati—tubectomised on March 7—was provided Rs 3,000 only for building her house. She too does not know what happened to the rest of the money.

Some have tried to fight for restoration of justice. Jalim Singh, a Hathras advocate and social worker, had reported these cases to the district officials but, predictably, met with no success. Says Singh fatalistically: "This seems to have become a routine sort of complaint for the local officials. There could be hundreds of other similar cases in other villages around Hathras."

Another pointer to the racketeering in the Indira Awas Yojana-family planning programme is the bizarre case of Ram Beti, 45. She possesses not one but two sterilisation identity cards. She was first operated upon on March 5, 1986 and was issued a card. She received Rs 3,000 for building her house soon after, but went on to conceive a son who was born in December 1987. Ram Beti got herself tubectomised again on April 19, 1988, and was issued another identity card. Her case has thus, probably, helped the authorities to complete quotas in two different years.

What is alarming is that cases such as these will be on the rise again this year, for there has been a tremendous increase in the quota of houses to be provided per block to the Harijans. According to official information, when the above seven women were operated upon in 1986, the quota of houses to be provided under the awas scheme was 26 for the entire Hathras block. Now the quota for the block, which has 89 gram panchayats, has been increased to 223 houses. A district official, on plea of anonymity, admitted: "Such cases take place because of lack of monitoring and, at times, because of the desperation to complete targets."

What is characteristic in this situation is that while the patients and village quacks squabble with each other, the district officials and doctors who conducted these tubectomies have got away scot-free and been transferred to new places where they can continue to play havoc with human lives.

—DILIP AWASTHI

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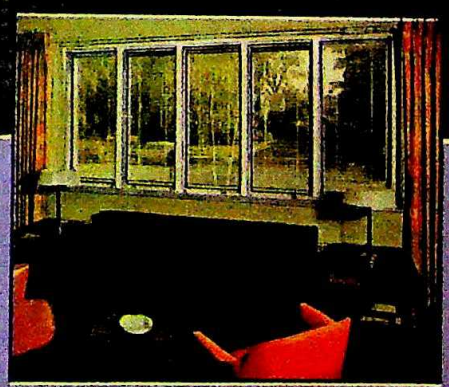

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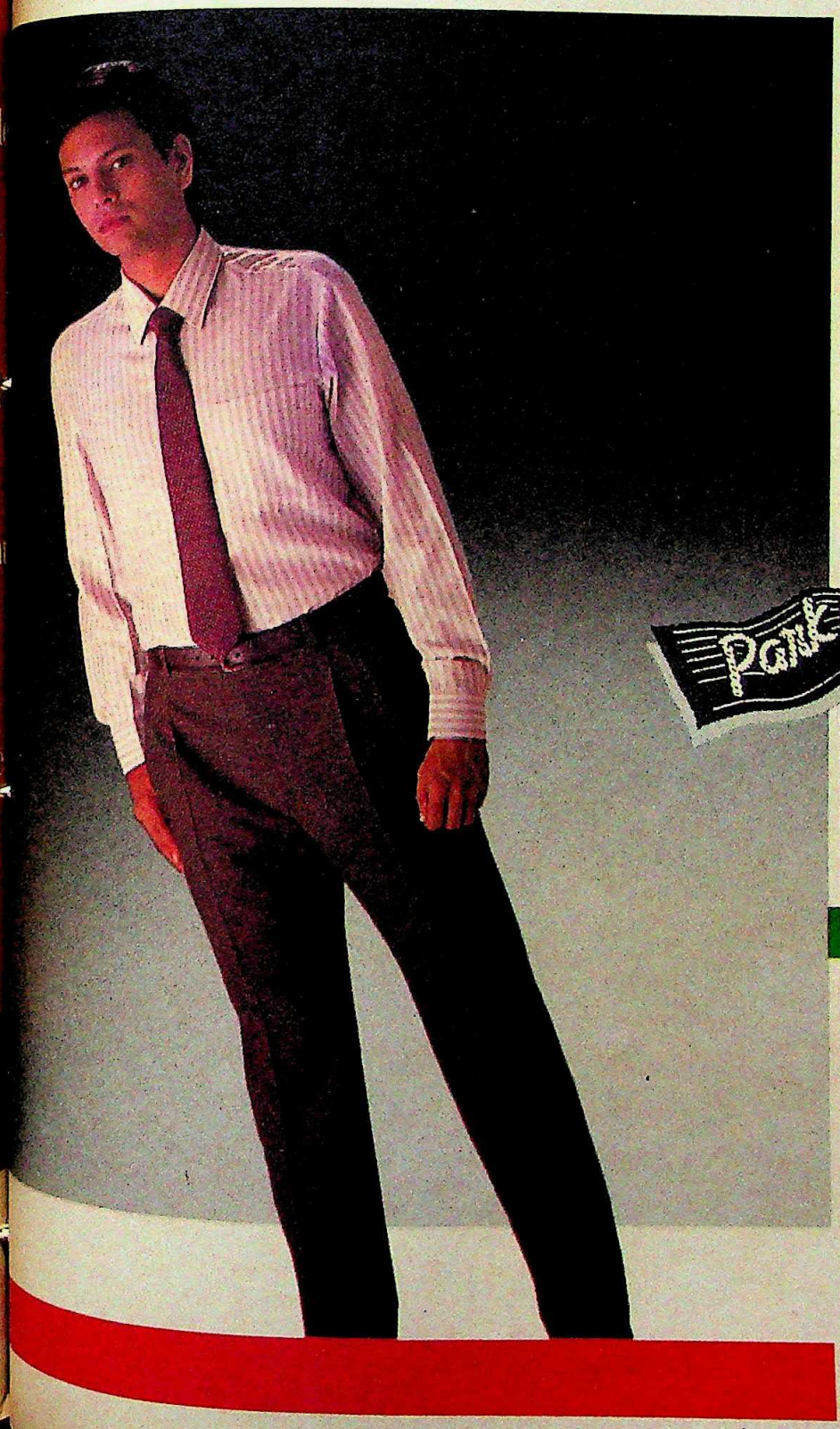

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DIRECTIONS ON PACK

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Trikaya

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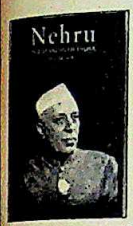
Ode to Nehru

A timely biography

NEHRU: The Making of India
by M.J. AKBAR
Viking
Price: Rs 375; Pages: 592



I had the privilege of being attached to Pandit Nehru as his press officer when he came to attend the first Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London. Much as I tried, I did not get close to him. Every time I started what I hoped would be a dialogue, he silenced me with an acid remark.

The first meeting was inauspicious. I was among a handful of India House officials who received him at Heathrow Airport on a chilly winter night. The next morning *The Herald*'s front-page had a large picture of Panditji with a lady in her night-gown opening the door for him. The caption read: "Lady Mountbatten's midnight caller." Panditji was furious—he believed I had tipped off the photographer. The high commissioner, Krishna Menon, cautioned me to keep my distance from him till his temper had blown over. Three days later several papers carried photographs of Panditji and Lady Mountbatten dining at a Greek restaurant. He again attributed this intrusion of his privacy to me. I was summoned to Claridges Hotel. First I had to convince his secretary M.O. Mathai that I knew nothing about his engagements and could not have possibly tipped anyone off. "You better tell him that," said Mathai letting me into Panditji's bedroom.

He was busy writing. He looked up and asked me what I wanted. "Sir, I am your press officer. You sent for me." Panditji gave me a withering look. "You have strange notions of publicity," he remarked. I did not try to give any explanations and fled from his presence.

The press conference, lunch for editors and book buying expeditions that followed were equally disastrous. He arrived at the press conference half-an-hour late and said loudly over the mike that he had not been told about it. (It was on his printed programme). Then he proceeded to give a brilliant exposition of India's case for Kashmir. Halfway through the editors' lunch, Panditji and Krishna Menon fell asleep. There was hardly any dialogue on any subject. Later in the afternoon when I took him to a bookstore, he was all smiles for people who recognised him and asked for autographs. All he bought were books by Bernard Shaw who had died a few weeks earlier. Back in the car I asked him if he got time to read. He snapped back, "of course not". The only other contact I had with Panditji was to show him photographs taken during the day. He tore up the ones that had caught him off-guard—yawning or picking his nose. The rest were cleared to be sent to India.

Though Akbar has unbounded admiration for Nehru, he has not been blind to his errors of judgement—caving in to the demand for Partition, for instance.

My personal experience of the great man was of impatience, irritability and vanity. Also of irresistible charm when he switched it on for foreigners and young people. But none of this qualified my estimation of him as one of the greatest sons of India who would rank in history with rulers like Ashoka, Sher Shah Suri and Akbar. I am reassured to see that Akbar's voluminous thesis that takes note of Panditji's temper, foibles and softness towards good looking women, agrees with my assessment of the man.

The first question that arises is—was there need for another biography of Nehru? The literature on Nehru makes a formidable list. There are 17 books by Nehru himself, including an autobiography. There are intimate accounts by members of the Nehru clan, including his sister Krishna Hutheesing and niece Nayantara Sehgal. Scholars, diplomats, civil servants and journalists have written extensively on him. We also have the what-the-butler-saw account of his secretary Mathai, who writes of a bastard sired by Panditji through Shardha Mata. Has Akbar anything to say which has not been said before? Although his work is entirely based on published material, the answer has to be yes. He has put it all together in a readable form. And though Akbar has unbounded admiration for Nehru, he has not been blind to his errors of judgement—caving in to the demand for Partition; choice of counsellors like Sardar Panikkar and Krishna Menon who had no political bases and who misled him into a confrontation with China and his support to ministers and chief ministers charged with corruption. In this reasonably fair assessment, one individual Akbar has been unfair to is Jinnah. Perhaps as an Indian Muslim who has seen the havoc caused to his community by Partition, his bias against the Qaid is understandable.

Because of his hero-worshipping attitude, Akbar has also been blind to the criticism made against Nehru for his approach to politics and economics. To him all talk of population explosion was capitalist propaganda. It is because he ignored family planning that population is the biggest challenge before the nation now.

It was Motilal Nehru who laid the foundations of the dynasty by amassing wealth as one of India's leading lawyers. He wanted his son to enter the ICS. Jawahar knew he could not make the grade. After schooling in Harrow, he got a second division at Cambridge. But seven years in Europe broadened his mind.

Nehru, the barrister, had no patience with law and plunged into politics. His choice was the Congress, which he strove to make a truly national party shorn of Hindu chauvinists who were gaining control. But he was basically an outsider in the party, a brown sahib. His adversaries were men like Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya, Shradhanand

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and N.B. Khare, who had reservations against Muslims. Khare aptly described Nehru as: "English by education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by accident." On the Muslim side, his opponents were the heirs of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who dismissed the Congress as a party of "a few Bengalis, who at the sight of a table knife crawl under the chair".

The secret of Nehru's rise to pre-eminence is accurately assessed by Akbar—"Nehru never wavered on two things: Gandhi would always be his leader and the Congress would always be his party. Freedom was the first priority; socialism would come later."

Another factor in building the Nehru mystique was the discarding of wealth by family members and the years spent in British jails by many of them. Nehru was jailed nine times and spent 3,263 days behind bars. Akbar correctly gauges the impact: "India loves no one more than the man who has nothing. Next to the Mahatma, Jawahar Lal became the greatest crowd-puller." Nehru's first seven years as prime minister were the most glorious. He laid the foundations of India's foreign policy, secular socialism and planned development. Akbar calls 1955 Nehru's "finest year". That year, Winston Churchill wrote to Nehru, describing him as "the light of Asia...you might be able to do what no other human being could in giving India the lead...."

After 1955 some of the shine on Nehru's illustrious face began to wear off. India did not make the promised leap forward; its policy of non-alignment foundered in the face of Chinese aggression. Nehru felt let down by everyone. And let himself down by manoeuvring to put his daughter in a position of power to ensure a dynastic succession. He died a broken, disillusioned man.

Perhaps the best summary of Nehru's career was written by Nehru himself in a self-parody *The Rashtrapati*, under the pen name Chanakya, in October 1937: "From the far north to Cape Comorin he has gone like some triumphant Ceasar, leaving a trail of glory and a legend behind him. Is all this for him just a passing fancy which amuses him, or some deep design, or the play of some force which he himself does not know? Is it his will to power, of which he speaks in his autobiography, that is driving him from crowd to crowd and making him whisper to himself:

I drew these tides of men into my hands
And wrote my will across the sky in stars."

—KHUSHWANT SINGH

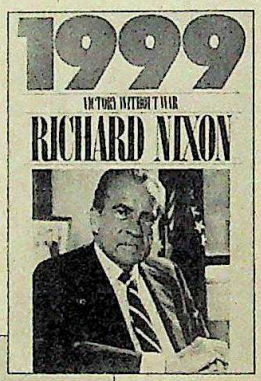
Nixon Doctrine

A crash course for Bush

1999: VICTORY WITHOUT WAR
by RICHARD NIXON
Sidgwick and Jackson
Distributed by Rupa & Co.
Price: Rs 200; Pages: 336

A week before the polling day, media-men accompanying US President-elect George Bush on his campaign trail found him lost in the pages of a thick book. "You seem as engrossed as a child reading his primer," chuckled a correspondent. Bush looked up, shrugged and returned to his book.

What he was reading is already being considered the American conservative's primer on foreign policy. When the world's most powerful nation seems so devoid of foreign policy talent, help has come from the man who's been dishing out "wisdom" at scores of universities and think-tanks but has now put it all into this impressive tome. Since his shameful exit as President in 1974, Richard Nixon has been trying to fulfil the one ambition that Watergate did not give him time to realise: to give America a long-term, conservative foreign policy doctrine mainly directed against the Soviets. Nixon criticises both Carter's superdoves and Reagan's superhawks, and presents a new formula to win for the West and the US the domination of the entire world by the turn of the century. This is to be achieved through diplomacy and wars, if any, may be in the Third World. "Moscow will continue to press forward in the Third World. It is essential that the US counter these moves as the Third World is where territory and people will actually swing from one side to the other."



The basis of the new Nixon doctrine is that the developed world is already pretty much divided up and the only place where gains and losses are still possible is the Third World.

If Bush is indeed reading it seriously, then the book is a must for Third World leaders. The basis of the new Nixon doctrine is that the developed world is already pretty much divided up and thus gains and losses are still possible only in the Third World which includes the US's vulnerable southern backyard and the Persian Gulf, "the jugular of the West".

If Bush is persuaded of this significance of the Third World it could benefit a growing regional power like India which has been increasingly ignored by the US. Contrary to popular belief in India, in the past decade US attention in Asia has polarised along an east-west axis with attention riveted on the NICs (newly industrialised countries) of the East and the troublespots west of Khyber.

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Nixon says the rest of the Third World should learn from India's successes and failures. "A promising industrial base grew in the 1960s but bureaucracy, the poison that saps the vitality of most Third World economies, grew faster," he laments, but compliments India for surviving as a democracy despite great odds: "It is like a dog walking on its hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised that it is done at all."

If Bush takes a leaf out of Nixon's book, he would have to backtrack a little from Reagan's approach to Star Wars and the competition in Europe but rev up the diplomatic pace in the Third World and China. That should also make the Bush White House warmer towards India than the Reagan White House—which could provide South Block mandarins some cold comfort.—SHEKHAR GUPTA

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and N.B. Khare, who had reservations against Muslims. Khare aptly described Nehru as: "English by education, Muslim by culture and Hindu by accident." On the Muslim side, his opponents were the heirs of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who dismissed the Congress as a party of "a few Bengalis, who at the sight of a table knife crawl under the chair".

The secret of Nehru's rise to preeminence is accurately assessed by Akbar—"Nehru never wavered on two things: Gandhi would always be his leader and the Congress would always be his party. Freedom was the first priority; socialism would come later."

Another factor in building the Nehru mystique was the discarding of wealth by family members and the years spent in British jails by many of them. Nehru was jailed nine times and spent 3,263 days behind bars. Akbar correctly gauges the impact: "India loves no one more than the man who has nothing. Next to the Mahatma, Jawahar Lal became the greatest crowd-puller." Nehru's first seven years as prime minister were the most glorious. He laid the foundations of India's foreign policy, secular socialism and planned development. Akbar calls 1955 Nehru's "finest year". That year, Winston Churchill wrote to Nehru, describing him as "the light of Asia...you might be able to do what no other human being could in giving India the lead...."

After 1955 some of the shine on Nehru's illustrious face began to wear off. India did not make the promised leap forward; its policy of non-alignment foundered in the face of Chinese aggression. Nehru felt let down by everyone. And let himself down by manoeuvring to put his daughter in a position of power to ensure a dynastic succession. He died a broken, disillusioned man.

Perhaps the best summary of Nehru's career was written by Nehru himself in a self-parody *The Rashtrapati*, under the pen name Chanakya, in October 1937: "From the far north to Cape Comorin he has gone like some triumphant Ceasar, leaving a trail of glory and a legend behind him. Is all this for him just a passing fancy which amuses him, or some deep design, or the play of some force which he himself does not know? Is it his will to power, of which he speaks in his autobiography, that is driving him from crowd to crowd and making him whisper to himself:

I drew these tides of men into my hands
And wrote my will across the sky in stars."

—KHUSHWANT SINGH

Nixon Doctrine

A crash course for Bush

1999: VICTORY WITHOUT WAR
by RICHARD NIXON
Sidgwick and Jackson
Distributed by Rupa & Co.
Price: Rs 200; Pages: 336

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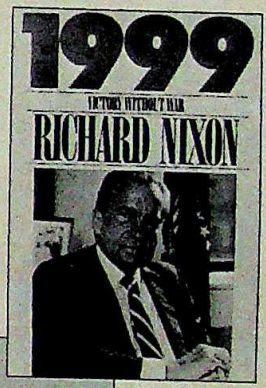

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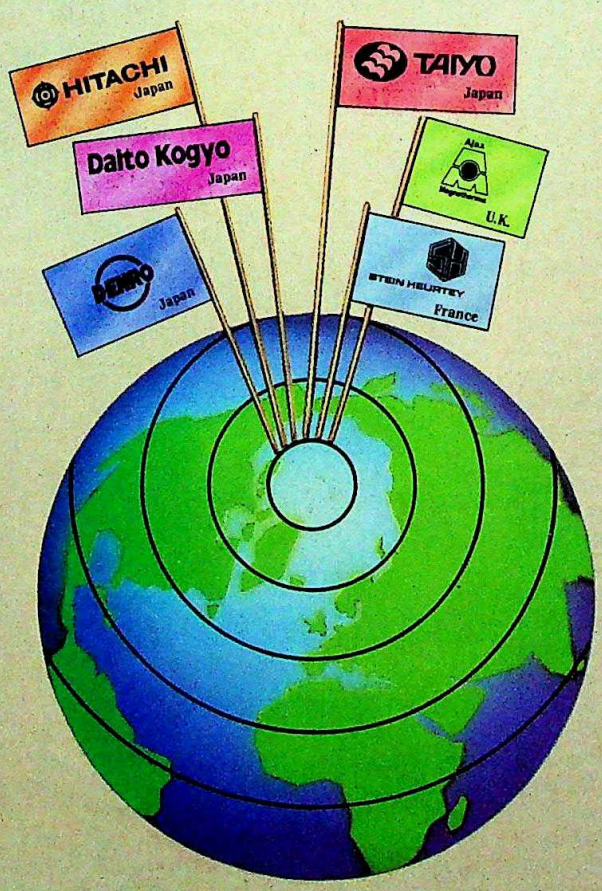

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NAMAS BHOJANI

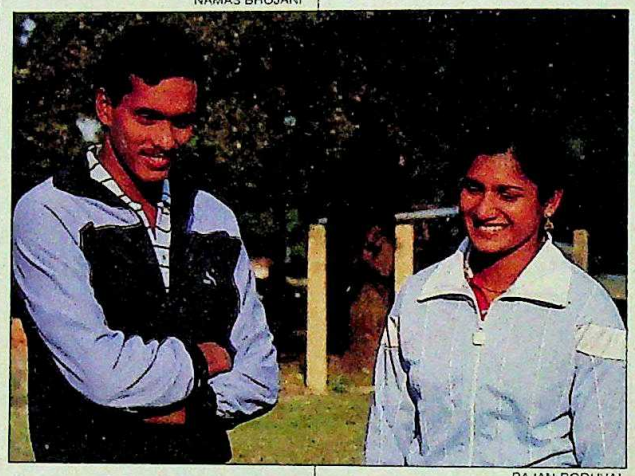
Rock Machine: rolling on

◆ Rock is rolling. And it's not only the Boss and Sting who have got Indians boogieing in the aisles. Last week it was local group **Rock Machine** that set Bombay stomping to numbers from their debut album, *Rock 'n' Roll Renegade*, before superstars Europe and Nazareth stepped under the strobes. The six-member group had even the Soviets jumping last June. The group members, in their mid-twenties, were obviously excited. Said bassist, Mark Selwyn: "It was a great moment for us—playing with international class sound equipment." Now all they need to get really rolling is to produce sound of an international quality.

Degra: body bountiful

◆ The Body Beautiful could become the Body Bountiful. At least that's what **Premchand Degra**, 32, is hoping. Having muscled his way to gold in the middleweight class in the Mr Universe contest in Brisbane—the first Indian to do so in 36 years—Degra says: "Now, I hope to get financial aid from the Government." He may not need to. He's been deluged with modelling offers and could soon flex his commercial muscles—Bombay film makers are eyeing his body too.

◆ Marriage was not the only thing that kept **Anup Jalota**, 35, busy last fortnight. The cherubic *bhajan* singer was involved in another labour of love in London, raising money for Hare Rama Hare Krishna devotees facing eviction from their temple premises. Jalota's contribution towards their litigation expenses from his concert was a whopping £ 30,000. Just before launching on the second phase of his honeymoon at Agra, Jalota explained his generosity: "I never charge anything from Hare Rama people. I have an emotional attachment with them."



RAJAN PODUVAL

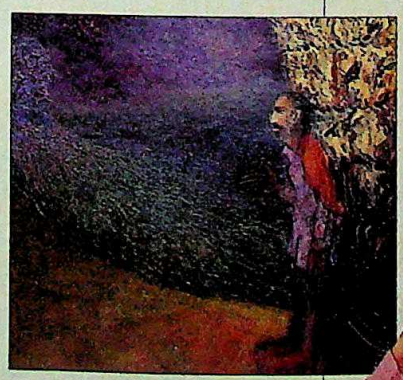
Cherian, Shiny: perfect start

◆ **Shiny Abraham**, 24, might have deviated from the track to forfeit an Asiad gold medal two years ago. But she stuck to her lane for her marriage to ace swimmer **Wilson Cherian**, 25, at Palai in Kerala last fortnight. "It was an arranged marriage," the bride's father, K.P. Abraham, hastened to clarify.

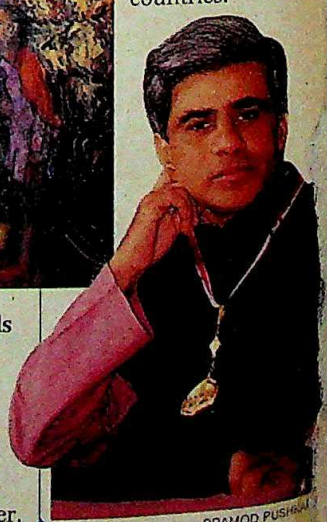
For the newly-wed star athletes, the honeymoon venue was pre-ordained: a coaching camp for the 1989 Asian Track and Field meet in New Delhi.

Jalota: labour of love

◆ What's artist **Vivan Sundaram** doing in war-torn Iraq? Actually, doing what he does best—winning more admirers for his work, including the jury that awarded him a gold medal and $15,000 at the recent International Festival of Art in Baghdad. Sundaram's three large canvases—Elegy for an Old Gardener, Cutter, Boy and Totem—painted only this summer brushed easily past 2,000 other works by artists from 50 countries.



Vivan with canvas: laurels



PRAMOD PUSHKAR

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Snap Poll Dilemma

If there is one issue that is igniting debate all over the country today it is the snap poll question. Impressive arguments have been marshalled both for and against; and for Rajiv Gandhi the decision is critical, his political survival perhaps hinging on it.

COVER STORY 28

Clergy Strikes Back

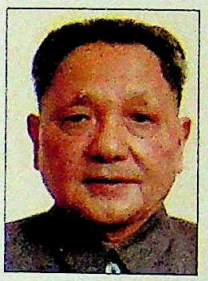
The rites of atonement of the excommunicated former chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala shocked the nation. The enaction of the bizarre ritual served as a grim reminder of the medieval brutality that underlies the Punjab political scenario.

SPECIAL REPORTS 38

Suspended Sentence

The black warrant was withdrawn twice last fortnight as Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh, condemned for Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination got another reprieve from the noose. But subsequent courtroom developments shrouded the case in fresh uncertainty.

SPECIAL REPORTS 42



Breaking the Ice

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's historic visit to China breaks the 26-year chill between the Asian giants. The prevailing set of pulls in world politics and the steadily changing regional scenario make for an opportune timing.

SPECIAL REPORTS 46

Battle for Supremacy

The sultans of Bombay's underworld are at war—among themselves. New alliances, new chieftains and a fragmented underworld have emerged. But the police point to one constant factor—Dubai-based don Dawood Ibrahim.

SPECIAL REPORTS 54

Mega Marriages

Weddings are no longer what they used to be. Conjured by fantasy, propelled by technology—and bottomless purses—they're now designed by the nouveau riche much as movie moghuls do their grand productions. A look at these bizarre flights of fantasy.

LIFESTYLE 154

CONTENTS

COMMENT 13
VOICES 14
CAPITALOOK 16
INDIANOTES 21
THE FORTNIGHT THAT WAS 23
COVER STORY
Rajiv Gandhi: Snap Poll Dilemma 28
SPECIAL REPORTS
Punjab: Clergy Strikes Back 38
Indira Gandhi Assassination: Suspended Sentence 42
Sino-Indian Relation: Breaking the Ice 46
Gang War: Battle for Supremacy 54
CURRENT EVENTS
Tamil Nadu: Preparing for Polls 60
Indian Airlines: Troubled Landings 62
Diplomacy: Embarrassing Exit 67
Bihar: Show of Strength 68
Bihar: New Gambit 76
Andhra Pradesh: Damp Squib 81
National Front: Grappling On 84
Uttar Pradesh: Idle Worship 89
Karnataka: New Charges 92
Maharashtra: Concert Blues 97
Madhya Pradesh: Party Favours 98
Babri Masjid: Splitting Heirs 98
Bottomline: Clearance Sail 107
STATENOTES 108
TRADE WINDS 113
BUSINESS
Delhi Industrial Belt: A Capital Growth 114
Foreign Investment: Discovering India 121
Benetton: Indian Debut 122
Bihar: An Industrial Stimulus 123
Durgapur: A Dream Sours 129
Britannia: A Big Bite 132
Shipping: Buoyant Again 138
Publishing: A Big Boom 143
The Market: Stiff Margins 145
THE ECONOMY MONITOR 147
NEIGHBOURS
Pakistan: Limited Options 150
LIFESTYLE
Weddings: The Mad World of Mega Marriages 154
SPECIAL FEATURE
Paranormal: Clues to the Unknown 162
SPORTS
IOA: Unsporting Contest 171
Chess: A Stalemate 173
BOOKS
An Artist's India 175
MEDIAWATCH 184
CINEMA
Bombay Festival: A Movable Feast 189
Malayalam Films: Celluloid Sultans of Kerala 190
ENVIRONMENT
Uttar Pradesh: The Ravaged Pines 197
EYE-CATCHERS 202

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INTRODUCING 1997. AND FACES

That question mark is hope. Hope for mothers and babies. And, of course, for clean air to be still around in 1997. So none of us would need a gas mask to breathe through.

Today, clean air is vanishing fast in our cities. And every badly maintained fuel driven vehicle spewing toxic matter is hastening its sad exit. And our lack of concern does not lighten our burden of guilt.

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VICTORY AT LAST

The recently concluded elections in Pakistan ("The New Challenge", December 15) prove that even after a decade of turmoil and repression democracy can raise its head again. Now that Benazir has achieved her aim of capturing power she should not let it go to her head.

Sambalpur, Orissa — SANJAY MOHANTY

■ Now Benazir can play the role Indira Gandhi played for so long in the subcontinent. And being born in the post-Partition period we can look forward to lasting peace in the region. Our foreign policy need no longer be based on being one-up on Pakistan.

Madras — K. ELANGOVAN

CHANGING VALUES

The sudden escalation in the popularity of the villain ("The Day of the Villain", November 30) is in accordance with the changing psyche of our people. Till about a few decades ago a person was judged by his character. It's no wonder today's heroes are corrupt politicians and people indulging in illegal trade. Villainy and violence have become the order of the day. The admiration with which screen villains are emulated by youngsters presents a horrifying prospect of a future devoid of human values.

Chandra Nagar — VALENTINA TRIVEDI

■ It is a dangerous and disturbing trend. Most Hindi films today portray the villain as the central character, making the audience 'hero-worship' him. This is responsible for the increase in the crime rate in the country.

Calcutta — ANJANA SINHA

■ If *Sholay* had been released today, Amjad 'Gabbar' Khan would have shot to superstardom instead of Amitabh Bachchan. In the south all film villains are superstars today. Audiences are even accepting them as heroes. At last bad days are over for filmi baddies.

Bangalore — K. CHIDANAND KUMAR

■ It would not be surprising if in the near future evil vanquishes good. In other words the villain bashes up the hero and wins the heroine in the end.

Hyderabad — B. BHIMA RAJU

■ The dividing line between villainy and heroism is fading gradually. The concept of heroism has been given a new form—of indulging in death and destruction to set right the evil order. Even heroines are getting very tough and are picking up Sten guns and knives with ease.

New Delhi — P.K. BOSE

WAYS OF MANIPULATION

I fully agree with your Comment ("Denying a Public Right", November 30). The true significance of a free election is lost when television and radio serve to advertise the ruling party. If, according to Rajiv Gandhi, India is not ready for autonomous TV and radio, are we ready to vote? Are we not even 'ready' for free and fair information?

New Delhi — SAMIR MARX MAHAJAN

■ Even if for argument's sake the media is made autonomous will it be able to function independently in letter and spirit? Experience has shown otherwise. The only way to break the monopoly of radio and television is to permit private parties to start radio and television services. Only then will All India Radio and Doordarshan be forced to improve their fare or fade into oblivion.

New Delhi — V. SAGAR

■ I have stopped switching on the television for Hindi and English news as we see more of Rajiv Gandhi than anything else.

Bangalore — E.R. KRISHNA

TAKING SIDES

It is sad that for the first time INDIA TODAY has begun taking sides at the cost of objectivity. While it rightly castigated Rajiv Gandhi for using Arun Govil in the Allahabad election campaign, it almost failed to take notice of V.P. Singh's use of Syed Abdullah Bukhari and Syed Shahabuddin in the same election. Now in its article ("Heat, Dust and Farce",

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November 30) it has only a mild comment to offer on V.P. Singh's unsubstantiated charges against Rajiv Gandhi.

New Delhi — PARAG JAIN

WRONG FACTS

The report ("Purveyors of Pulp", November 15) mentions that the magazine *Oothappu* "hit the market in the last couple of months". In fact *Oothappu* is more than four years old. Again, it quotes a 'renowned' Tamil writer, Y. Subramanyam. I am a Tamil writer of 25 years standing and I have never heard of this 'renowned' writer.

Madras — P.S. RANGANATHAN 'KADUGU'

FAILING ADMINISTRATION

The administration's failure to protect the main market of a small but important industrial town against bomb blasts ("Deadly Spurt", November 30) once again disproves the Government's claim that the terrorists are a divided lot. It also shows that imaginative and effective security measures are lacking.

Batala, Punjab — SANJAY SANAN

OVERPRICED NECESSITIES

Regarding your article on garments ("The Big Rush", November 30) the reason why the readymade clothes business is growing by 20 to 25 per cent per annum whereas shoe sales are growing by 6 to 7 per cent is that shoes are overpriced—a pair costs Rs 300. And unless this situation changes many Indians will continue to walk bare-footed even in the 21st century.

Bangalore — A.J. PEREIRA

DISTORTED REPORT

INDIA TODAY has enjoyed a reputation for objective and unbiased reporting. It has upheld the highest standards of journalistic integrity. I was, therefore, surprised and distressed to read the distortions in the story entitled "The Maharaja's Travails" (December 15).

The writer appears to have had a secret agenda of establishing a public controversy between the managing director and myself. He has chosen to omit whatever I had said in recognition of the achievements of the management in improving the airline's operations. He has also chosen to omit my statements supporting the need to eliminate first class travel by staff, and in fact omits any positive comments which I made relating to Air-India. Instead, he has distorted my views by carefully choosing to quote only those parts of my statements which reflect a difference of view with the management. I was also amazed to read the frivolous comment, alleged to have been made by me, regarding the suitability of Mr Jetley in a Tata organisation. Not only is this a deliberate distortion, that I consider highly offensive, but it is also undoubtedly a motivated act to create conflict.

I would like to go on record to state that Mr Jetley and I are both totally committed to the goal of making Air-India a successful airline. While we have had occasional differences of view in our respective approaches to achieving this common goal, each of us has made conscious efforts to better understand the other's point of view. This has gone a long way in enabling us to complement each other's roles and to discharge our respective responsibilities professionally. This working relationship can only be enhanced over time and in the absence of external provocation from the media.

Bombay — RATAN N. TATA
chairman, Air-India

The author of the piece, Ramindar Singh, met Mr Tata in Bombay on November 21st. The story was written on the basis of that meeting. The remarks quoted in the article are on tape except one. The remark about Mr Jetley's suitability in a Tata organisation was mistakenly attributed to Mr Tata for which we apologise.

On November 25th, Mr Tata requested another meeting with Ramindar Singh. By then, the article had already been written and was in the press. In these circumstances we trust Mr Tata will understand that the appreciative comments he made about Mr Jetley on November 25th were left out neither intentionally nor as he suggests, to spice up the story, but for deadline compulsions.
—Editor

DIFFERING OPINION

I was unhappy to read the piece on the Defence Planning Staff in Capitalook ("Defunct Planning", November 15). From the time of its creation in early 1986 till November 30, 1987, I happened to be chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee. In a country where pulling together is not one of our strengths, we have in the Defence Planning Staff a team who in their day to day work are not conscious of the colour of the uniform they wear.

Gurgaon — Admiral (retd) R.H. TAHILIANI

NO TEETH

The article on environment ("Development Dilemma", November 30) brought out the urgency of the issue. The Ministry of Environment and Forests is in the grip of bureaucrats who have little concern for the ecological disaster that we are heading for. Its objections to the Narmada Valley Project and the Tehri Dam have been brushed aside. It is clear that the ministry cuts into the interests of both politicians and industrialists.

Jamshedpur — ROHIT BANSAL

A LOYAL SON

In his speeches Rajiv Gandhi always emphasises that he does everything in accordance with Mrs Gandhi's wishes. Now that he has signed an agreement with the Soviets for setting up two power plants ("A Nuclear Bear Hug", December 15) would he like to say that Mrs Gandhi prudently evaded the offer because she believed that self-reliance in this area was of vital importance, and as her son he knows when to obey or disobey her.

Renukoot, (UP) — RINKOO O. PRAKASH

DIFFERENT YARDSTICKS

Instead of treating an experienced batsman like Mohinder Amarnath as an asset to the Indian side , the selection committee has dropped him on some obscure grounds ("Familiar Fissures", November 30). If Ravi Shastri has really been retained to allay adverse public reaction, it is all the more shameful. Just because Amarnath maintains a low profile it does not mean that he lacks fans and admirers.

Aurangabad — SURESH BORKAR

UNWARRANTED MESS

The comments in your special report on Sri Lanka ("On The Brink", November 15) overlooked the most atrocious military handling of the situation. The blame for the initial bungling can be laid at the doorstep of General K. Sundarji, Lt-General Depinder Singh and Major-General Harkirat Singh and the continuing thread in the bizarre mess is the present chief of the IPKF Lt- General A.S. Kalkat who was the chief operational planner right from June 1987. With his totally incompetent handling the lt-general has given the Indian Army a bad image.

Noida, (UP) — Colonel S.K. SHARMA

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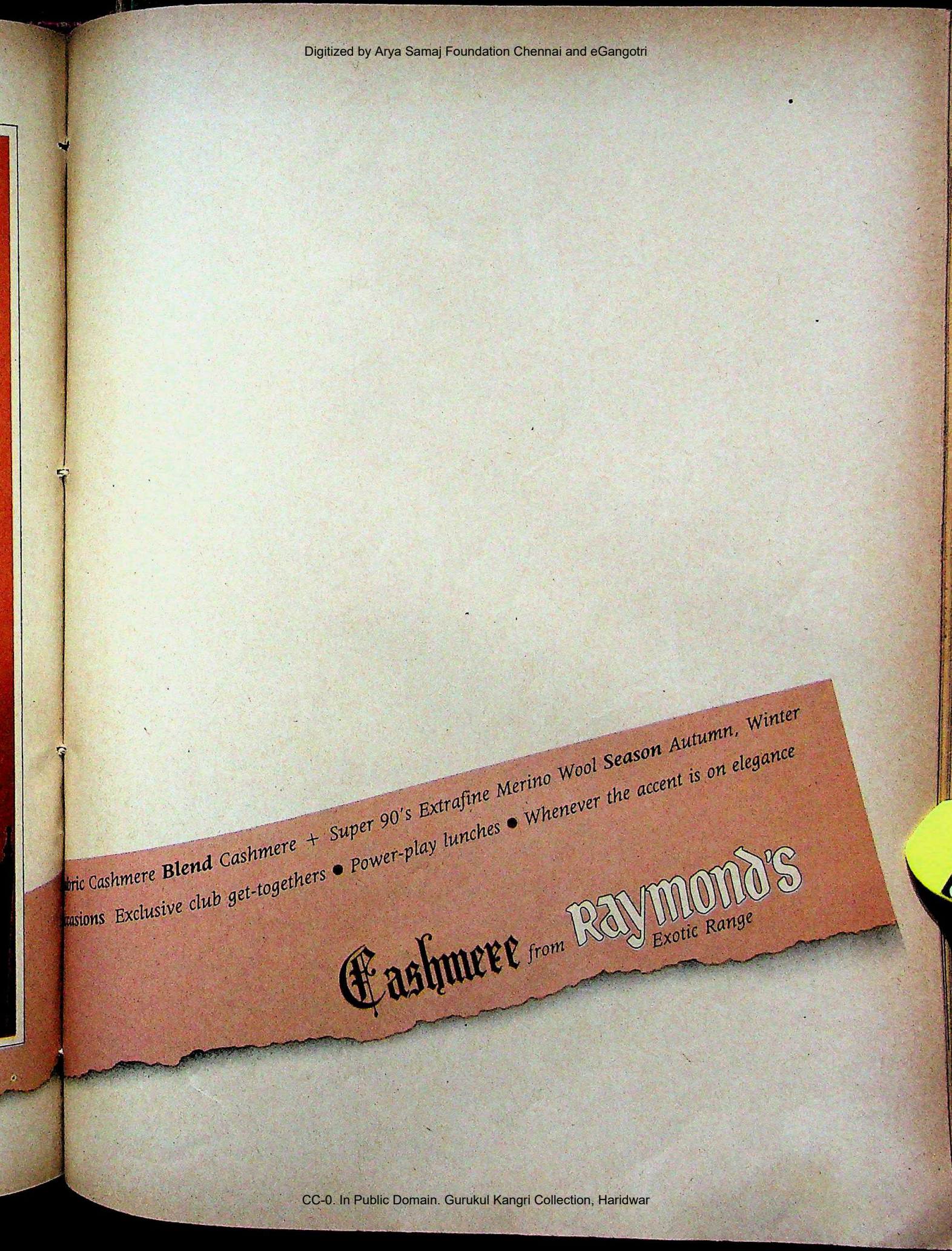

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The Civil Service Durbar

OF late there has developed at the top rung of power in New Delhi what one hopes is no more than an aberrant quirk in the method of governance. It has not gone unnoticed within the civil service or the council of ministers, drawing grumbles from both quarters.

The much ado is about a coterie of overcommitted and overzealous senior bureaucrats who now surround the prime minister and have taken upon themselves the responsibility of protecting and projecting him, ignoring all norms of accepted official behaviour. In the absence of any defined responsibilities, they tend to stray into areas which strictly speaking are outside their purview. These senior officials function in the manner of a privy council, outside the pale of ministerial control, and more or less insulated from the self-disciplinary pulls of the career service.

And in turn they foster a we-and-they mindset in which all critics are seen as personal enemies, press reports on maladministration are dismissed as personal vendettas, and political opponents are painted as subversive enemies of the nation. It all smacks of a siege mentality. A prime minister can ill afford to be isolated. Effective leadership demands that the leader be presented with the widest number of options and alternatives available on any given situation. To act effectively and decisively, without ignorance and without bias, the leader should have access to a multi-channel information system. Rajiv Gandhi's greatest asset in his first year as prime minister was his openness and willingness to listen to diverse opinion from bureaucrats, politicians and outside experts. And for this, above all, he received accolades from every quarter.

Illustration by MANJULA PADMANABHAN

Doubtless, the prime minister keeps the right to rely on aides of his own choosing. The new mode of functioning is perhaps a recoil from the repeated betrayals he suffered at the hands of those in whom he reposed blind faith. Rajiv Gandhi is a man apparently ill at ease with most of his cabinet colleagues who can share neither the style of his functioning nor the substance of what most deeply moves and motivates him. But this does not bode well for the country. The prime minister must fling open more windows to the world and let political cross-currents of every hue flow around him; he must let opposing views be expressed. Debate, after all, is the essence of the best decision-making.

The present path of governance is fraught with pitfalls. Civil servants ought not to become the voice of the master or lend their voice to the master. Their strength must always stem from their ability to proffer disinterested advice and prevent any embarrassment to the Government from the wrongful word or act. They are insulated from summary punishment from their political bosses for precisely this reason: to ensure they do not turn into pliant yes-men at the expense of constitutional and civic principles; and to make certain they do not lose their ability to step back, ruminate, and weigh issues in perspective.

But this insularity they enjoy has a dangerous flip side. Apex coteries can indifferently discard all manner of accountability towards other ministers—in fact, senior ministers are overly solicitous of the chosen bureaucrats for fear of annoying the top man—and even worse, get divorced from the rest of the senior civil service (which is traditionally accountable). And there is nothing more debilitating for administration than a civil service divided horizontally along the lines of the politically committed and the regulars. There is also spawned the grave danger that during a change of government the politically-committed civil servants will be hounded and talents as they can offer will be spitefully wasted. Then, the continuity beneath political change that civil servants are meant to impart to administration, will be grievously marred.

Civil servants being marshalled for political advice is nothing new. Every prime minister from Nehru to Morarji Desai has used politico-bureaucrats for sensitive assignments. But there was a difference: these gentlemen held formal positions and were respected by partymen and opposition leaders alike.

Times have changed. And so has India. And, perhaps, to govern this ungovernable land, the prime minister does need like-minded people of proven independence and integrity from outside the ambit of elected politicians. The mistake may have been in choosing people from within the career service and not formalising their appointment and role. So they escape the flak for their errors and it is the prime minister who reaps the attacks of opponents both within the Government and outside. Worse, these civil servants often wash their hands of any piece of advice that leads to adverse reaction either from the media or the politicians. The latter in any case refuse to defend the prime minister, pleading that they do not form part of the decision-making process. As a result the prime minister loses a buffer essential for his survival.

Perhaps it is high time to contemplate a quasi-presidential arrangement in which the prime minister and his ministers could staff their ministries with outright political appointees. This may be a way of not only keeping the career service intact and preventing a civil service durbar from mushrooming around the prime minister, but also ensuring that the prime minister's electoral mandate is carried out effectively by politically responsive appointees in each ministry.

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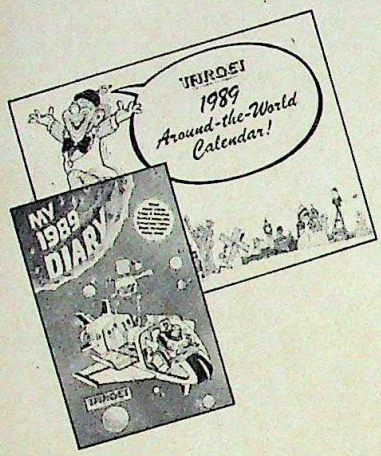

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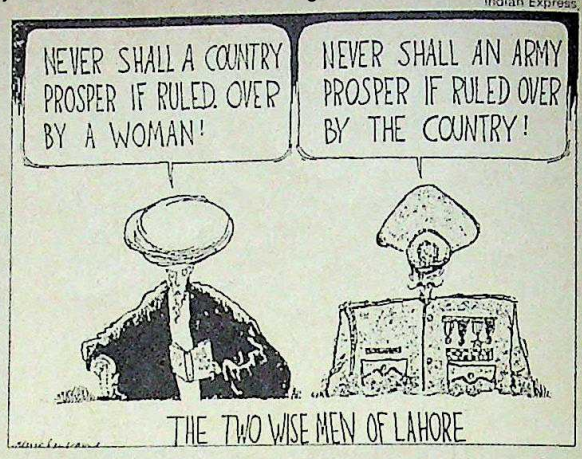

● *It is a national affront, not a National Front.*

■ RAJIV GANDHI at a public meeting in Madras

● *Infighting is a pastime with Akalis....They remain strong by fighting.*

■ SURJIT SINGH BARNALA in *The Sunday Observer*

● *This variety of cheap political gimmickry....based on untruths to which Mr Jethmalani is used to, never pays in a country where the electorate is sensible, discerning and mature.*

■ SATISH SHARMA, MP, on Ram Jethmalani's allegations of a link between Svenska and Maruti Technical Services

● *I would not be deterred from doing my duty to the nation by the kind of abuse which Mr Satish Sharma and other friends of the prime minister....habitually employ against their opponents.*

■ RAM JETHMALANI in *Indian Express*

● *Our days have come again. We were getting bored.*

■ A GNLF member, after Party President Subhas Ghising revived the demand for statehood, in *The Telegraph*

● *I believe that V.P. Singh is doing a wrong thing by criticising Rajiv Gandhi and not the Congress.*

■ MULAYAM SINGH YADAV, Lok Dal leader from Uttar Pradesh who recently switched from the Bahuguna to the Devi Lal camp, in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*

● *If I were the prime minister I would have granted clemency to Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh.*

■ MENAKA GANDHI in *Onlooker*

● *I am prepared to swap property with him (Suresh Kalmadi) because he will be the loser in the process.*

■ BAL THACKERAY, Shiv Sena chief, on being accused of corruption by the Congress(I)'s Kalmadi

● *It is the duty of artists in India to smuggle in Rushdie's book (The Satanic Verses).*

■ WOLE SOYINKA, Nobel laureate in literature, in *The Indian Post*

● *Ravi (Shastri) is being booed everywhere and this is unfortunate. The repeated hai-hais could adversely affect his game.*

■ DILIP VENGSARKAR at a press conference during the Bombay Test

● *I've stopped accepting assignments for the last 10 years except for the few stray ones. Where is all the talent, why hasn't it surfaced, why is no one shining?*

■ LATA MANGESHKAR in *Stardust*

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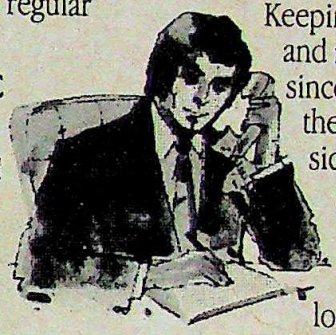

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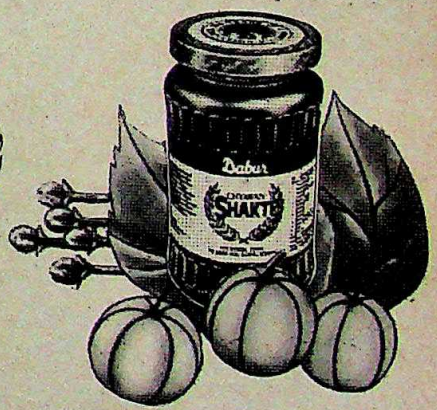

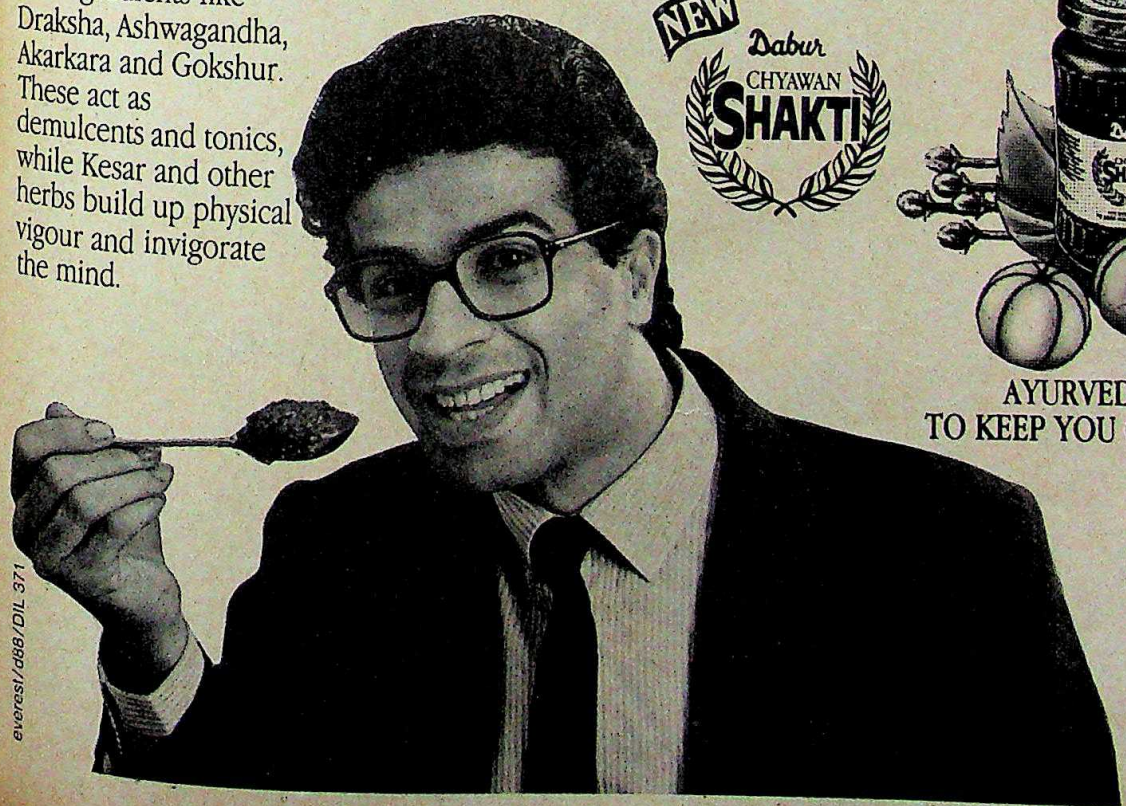

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RAW Success

● The foreign office and the cloak-and-dagger Research and Analysis Wing are often at loggerheads on international issues. Career diplomats have long complained that their spooky brethren—who have insinuated themselves

into innocuous-sounding posts in missions abroad—spend more time spying on Indian diplomats than on ferreting out foreign secrets.

The RAW-wallahs are now asserting justification for their proliferation abroad. They say the main reason for this was to get solid leads on expatriate Sikhs and their pro-Khalistani activities. RAW supporters declare the intelligence agency has made considerable headway in this regard.

A five-year-long surveillance of Washington-based Sikh activist Ganga Singh Dhillon, South Block sources say, is now paying dividends. Dhillon—a US passport holder who used to move freely between Washington, London and Pakistan to propagate the "Sikh cause"—has for the first time been denied a visa to enter England on grounds of national security. The real reason, says British member of Parliament Terry Dicks, is that "the Indian Government has brought pressure on the British Government". The RAW-hides will deny this in public, of course, but with a chuckle on the side.

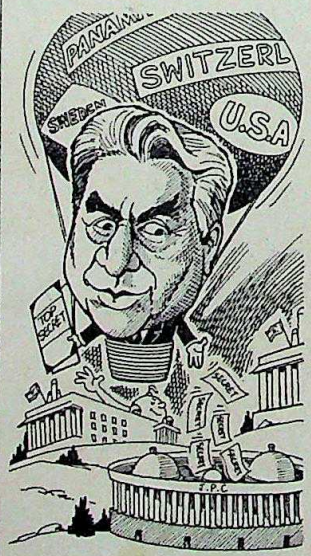
Flying Sleuth

● CBI supercat Mohan Katre must surely be the most peripatetic high-level sleuth any nation could boast of. The almost-retired officer has been hotfooting it around the globe for over a year now chasing what the Government claims are the *real* clues that will solve the Bofors mystery.

Katre's peregrinations have taken him across Europe (Switzerland of course!), the US and Latin America (after all, Panama was a must!) in search of those behind the secret bank accounts.

At the drop of a new Bofors connection, as if by reflex, Katre gets into globe-trotting gear and careens off into the yonder. But what he brings back home is anybody's guess. Members of the now defunct Joint Parliamentary Committee still complain that Katre withheld confidences.

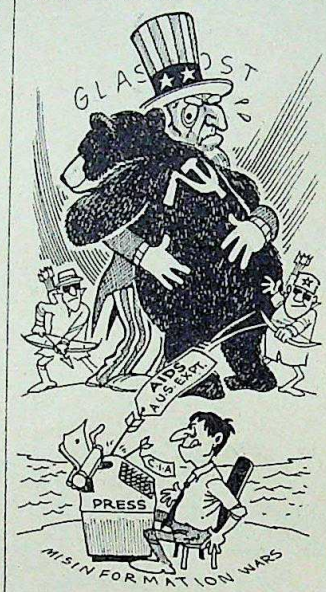
Cartoons by AJIT NINAN



Now, even cabinet ministers who have to answer Bofors-related questions in Parliament, are grumbling that Katre feeds them just crumbs of information. He saves the icing for, as one minister put it—"the very top".

Plant War

● Notwithstanding gusts of American-Soviet summitry, the cat-and-mouse games the superpowers play on foreign soils continue. Tom and Jerry continue baiting each other in Delhi as if unaware of the activities of Mikhail and Ron-



ald elsewhere.

In the propaganda war in Delhi, the latest salvo fired by the US Embassy is a semi-confidential document that assesses India's press as "easily penetrated" by Soviet agitprop.

Contained in the document is a long list of so-called Soviet plants in the Indian press which have been aimed at tarring Uncle Sam's image. Heading the list is the story about AIDS being the product of biological warfare experiments in Maryland which first appeared in the *Patriot*, then hit international headlines. Another nasty doled out is a photostat copy of the forged letter from former CIA director, William Casey to the Heritage Foundation "praising it for laying out a blueprint for destabilising Rajiv's Government".

The Russians, claim the Americans, really understand the Indian press. They "do a great deal of their placement work at night on week-ends and holidays when... skeletal crews of low ranking journalists, more susceptible to enticements, are in charge".

Paper Punches

● The prime minister's supporters—many of whom believe he is getting a raw deal from the press—are gearing up for some counter-punching. So, two papers, which will show editorial solicitude for the ruling party, are expected to soon make their appearance in Delhi.

The main target, of course, is the gadfly *Indian Express* which ceaselessly lampoons Rajiv Gandhi and his friends. There is a "friendly" paper in town, the *National Herald*, but it has proved unequal to the political challenge.

One of the two new publications championing the Congress cause will be a weekly tabloid published by Rajpal Singh Chowdhary, the Falstaffian editor of the nearly defunct *Delhi Recorder*, who

also doubles up as a PR-man for the Indian Government in London. The other is the *Daily*, published from Bombay, which businessman Lalit Suri now plans to bring to the capital. Both Suri and Chowdhary are trying to attract editorial talent by offering lavish five-figure salaries.

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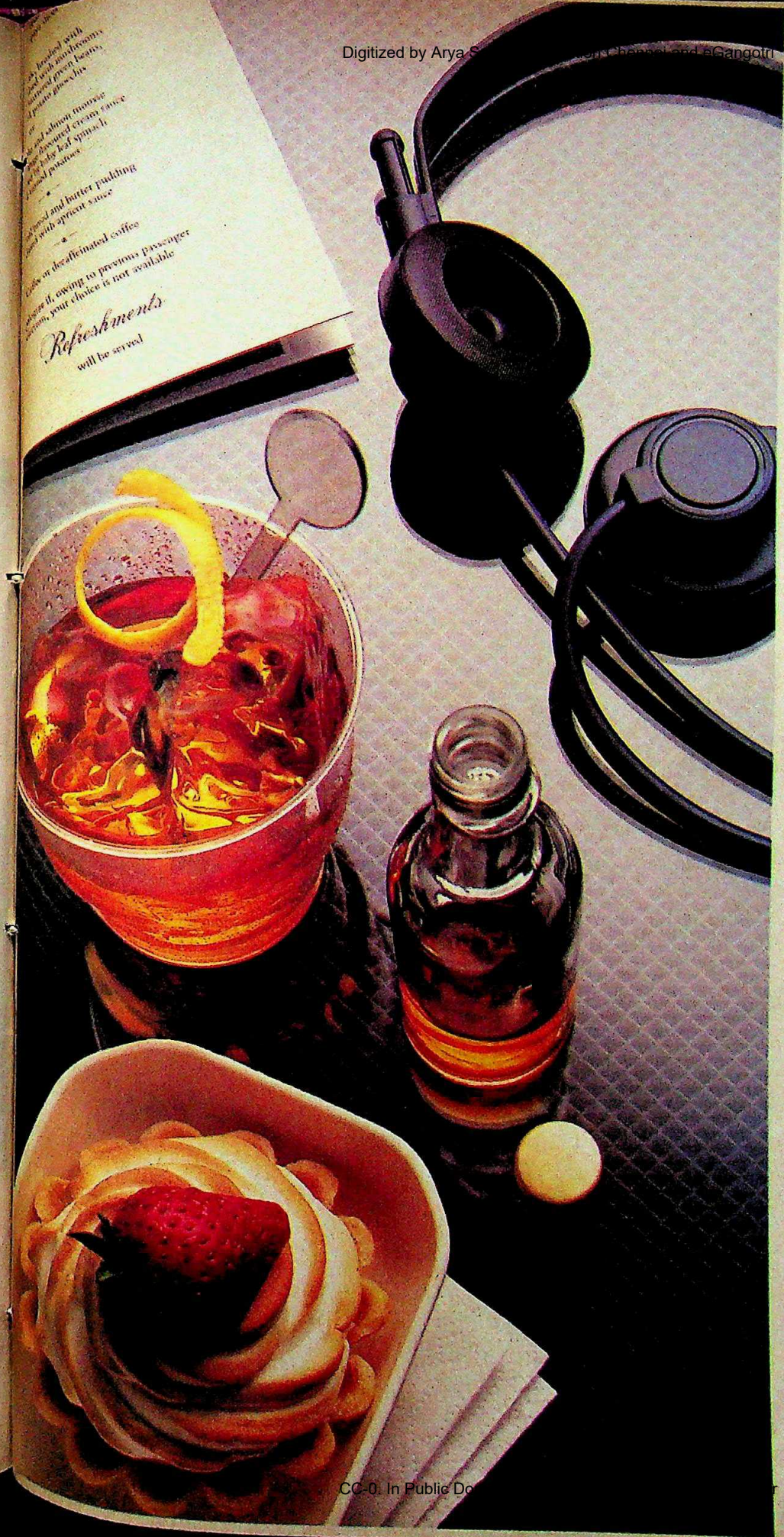

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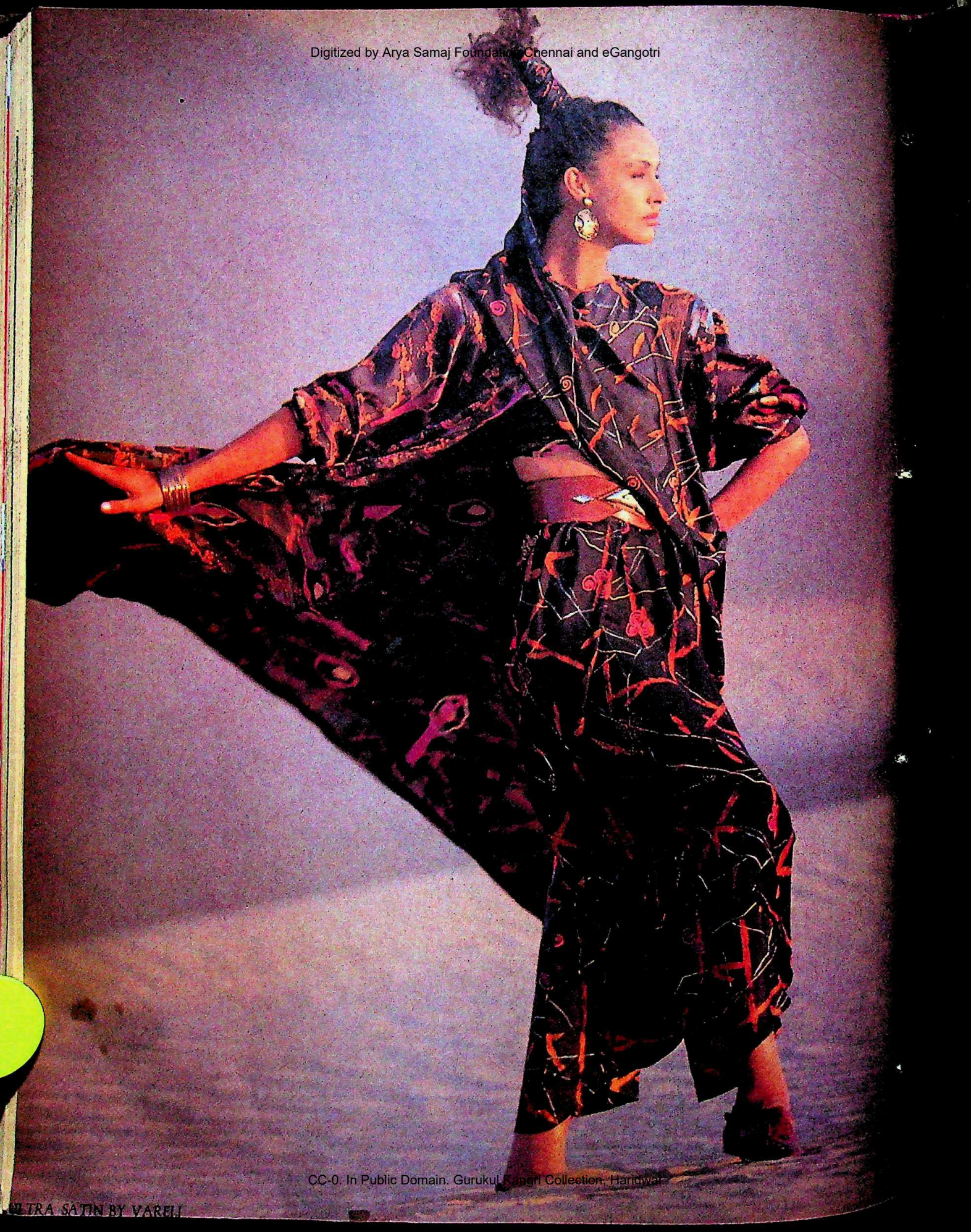

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PRESS SCOOPS

■ As far as some Delhi scribes were concerned, Christmas came in late November—when Santa Claus visited the annual India International Trade Fair at Pragati Maidan with a bagful of goodies.

As most pavilions shower gifts on journalists, many die-hard investigative reporters turned up. Most were investigating the route to the Italian pavilion where scotch and mini-cameras along with colour film awaited them.

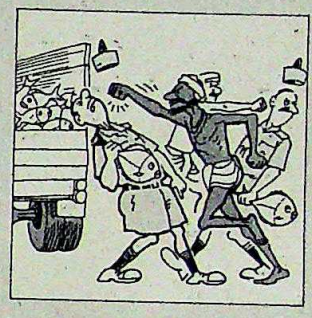
The tribe of pressmen snatched and grabbed anything in sight. And as often happens in the course of chasing stories, their less pushy colleagues went home empty handed.

But a breed known as mela journalists (also called *thaila* journalists)—whose publications thrive on government advertisements and who are only seen at fairs and press junkets—beat the investigative reporters this time. They comfortably outscooped the competition by a mile at the trade fair.

FISH FILCHERS

■ The entire episode was fishy. It took place in Bhubaneswar, known for—besides temples and Patnaiks—sea shores abundant with fish. And where there are fish, there must be fishermen—and a fish market somewhere round the corner. Naturally, fishermen transport fish to the fish market in a truck.

These were then the principal props and characters of the stage. That's when three constables and a home guard, all in uniform arrived. But lo and behold! fishy was their behaviour—they were trying to steal fish from a truck.



Regardless of the policemen's clout, the fish traders were not going to part with their wares so easily. So they sprung on the culprits, gave them a sound thrashing and marched them to the nearest police station where a complaint was registered.

The four fish filchers have now been forced to face the ignominy of suspension.

SECULAR RITES

■ One departed soul from Jabalpur was a lucky man when alive. Unlike most males who are fated to dull domesticity with one wife, Ajek—a labourer in a vehicle factory—had married thrice.

And after a heart failure put an end to Ajek's merry existence, it turned out that he had been a man with an open heart in more ways than one: the second wife was a Christian and the third, a Muslim. While this lady insisted that the last rites be performed according to Islam—claiming Ajek had converted to the faith—the second spouse maintained he was a Christian.

Finally, the police forced a compromise. The body was kept overnight at the Christian's house and in the morning, buried according to Muslim rites. The two even agreed to share Ajek's pension.

P.S: we are still trying to find out what happened to the first wife.

LINGUAL MIX-UPS

■ History has shown that languages create more divides than bonds between humankind. Having learnt this lesson well, the Goan Government gives equal pride of place to Hindi, English, Marathi and Konkani. Result: official invitation cards resemble booklets, as the same message is repeated in four languages.

When Goa attained statehood, aside from English, Konkani began being used on official invitations. Promptly, the Marathi-speakers pointed out that they could not be ignored under the Official Languages Act. By the same logic, it was reasoned that the national language, Hindi, too could not be left out.

The Goan Government has even set up a separate cell to translate invitations. Yet there are mix-ups, the results of which can be comic: invitees to official functions frequently turn up at different venues on wrong dates.

KALYUG'S HASTINAPUR

■ The telecast of *Mahabharat* has suddenly put the spotlight on Hastinapur, a tiny township 35 km off Meerut. So neglected has the legendary capital of the Pandavas been in recent years, that residents were heard asking if their muddy little town was indeed the Hastinapur of the glorious past.

Comparisons may be odious, but Hastinapur's latterday residents could not help compare their township's plight with the grandeur of yore. And they suddenly developed concern for the ruins of monuments believed to have been *Kunti ka mahal* and *Draupadi ka mahal*. "Protected" proclaims the rusted iron plate outside the monuments, but the obvious signs of neglect suggest otherwise.

Clearly, the residents of the Hastinapur of kalyug will have to fight another mahabharat to ensure that their historic town gets its due from the state.

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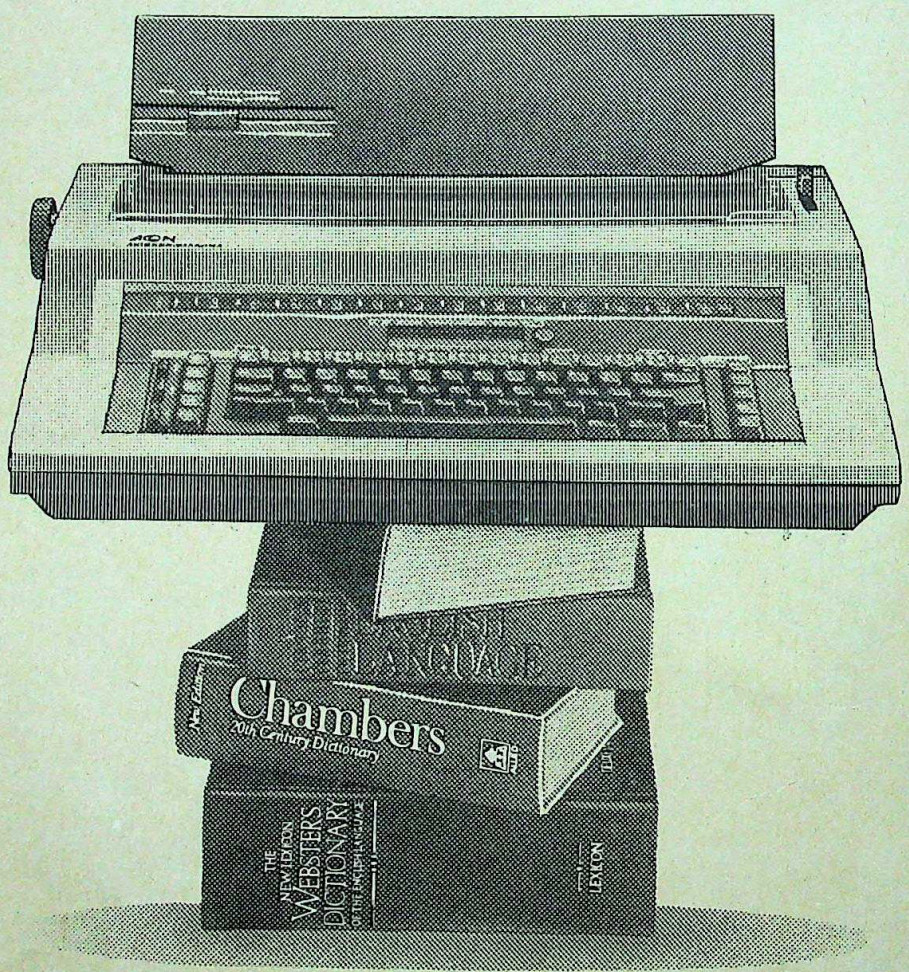

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Elements of Absurdity

Sonia's birthday celebrations in Uttar Pradesh marked a new high for sycophancy

THE year edges to a close—and its passage to history. It is a time to take critical stock and scrutinise the balance sheets of 1988. But in some strange manner, the events of the fortnight seemed to sum up the year, and its direction, in unusually accurate measure.

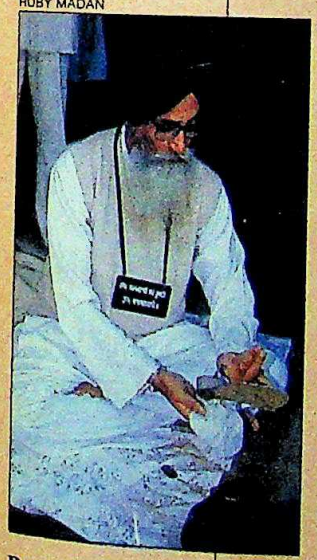
In retrospect, perhaps it is not so strange after all. There is now an element of absurdity in even the most serious issues of the day. The level of political exchange is becoming almost childish in its content as is the new level of sycophancy. The Congress(I) Party chief of the largest and most politically sensitive state in the Indian Union declares that Sonia Gandhi is "like a God to me". In the state capital, Lucknow, prayers are conducted in honour of her birthday, district units are directed to celebrate the occasion and her portrait is garlanded and genuflected before. The ultimate absurdity?—Sonia Gandhi's birthday is not even on that day.

Even the most serious issue of the fortnight, the scheduled execution of the convicted assassins of the late Indira Gandhi, degenerated into an anti-climactic battle over technicalities as the Supreme Court stayed its own orders. Whatever the final outcome, the delay and renewed legal debate has succeeded in diluting the awesome enormity of the crime.

The legal blockage of the execution of Mrs Gandhi's assassins was an anticlimax

Even summits abroad, it appears, are not to be deprived of their share of absurdity. Rajiv's visit to Beijing is hailed as a major breakthrough. Yet, the Indian Government, in absurd paranoia, asks the Chinese Government not to issue visas to any Indians (other than those accompanying the prime minister) for two weeks before and during the visit. Such ridiculous requests can only demean the office of the leader of the world's largest democracy.

RUBY MADAN



Barnala's humiliation illustrated the dead-end of Punjab's political future

In Punjab, we have an even more absurd sight—of a former chief minister and a man who had once defied the Akal Takht—meekly succumbing to the humiliation of being tied to a pillar and shining shoes as penance "for his sins". The real shame is that a religion as pure and compassionate as Sikhism should have to degenerate into medieval barbarism at the altar of politics. More than all the terrorist killings, it was that one heart-breaking image of Barnala that really illustrated the dead-end of Punjab's political future.

In Bihar, another former chief minister, the irrepressible Jagannath Mishra, defies the Congress(I) high command—and shares a platform with opposition leaders—and yet the ruling party can do nothing to avert the embarrassment. The absurdity is that Mishra publicly blames his own party for neglecting the state—thus affecting its electoral clout in what is possibly an election year—and still continues to swear that he is a loyal servant of the party and the prime minister.

Bombay's underworld dons now appear above the law

In Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao summons a special press conference to make his assets public. Amidst characteristic histrionics, Rama Rao piously declares "my life is an open book". But he also blithely ignores the obvious fact that there are still some closed chapters—many of his more prominent assets are missing from the list.

Finally, Bombay, the country's most sophisticated city, witnesses a Chicago-style gang war in its streets and in broad daylight. Rival gangsters are gunned down outside courts, in their homes and on public highways. The weapons in employment are modern machine-guns and AK-47s. It may appear absurd that the war has its origins in distant Dubai. But what is even more absurd is that known underworld dons are now paragons of respectability and thus above the law. The law of increasing absurdities.

—DILIP BOBB

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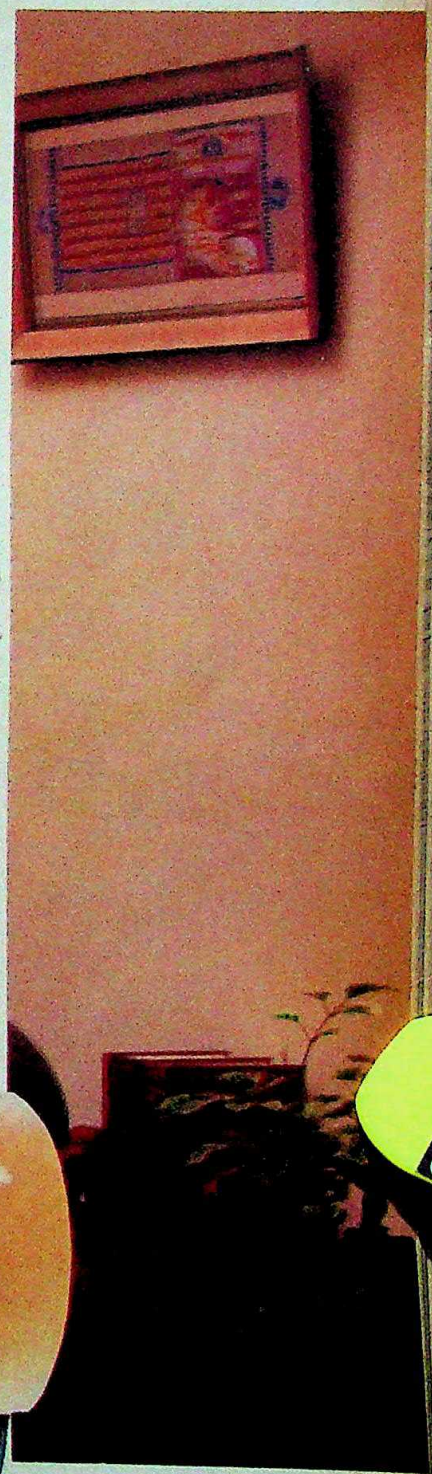

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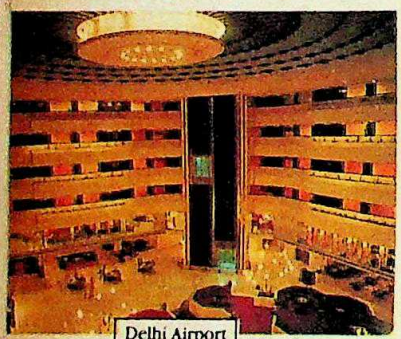

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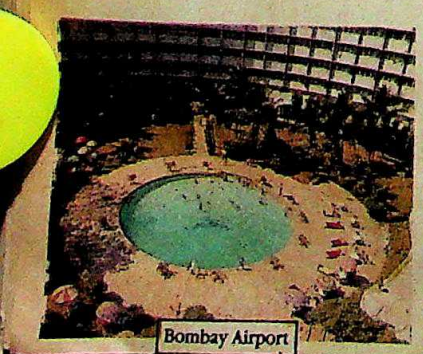

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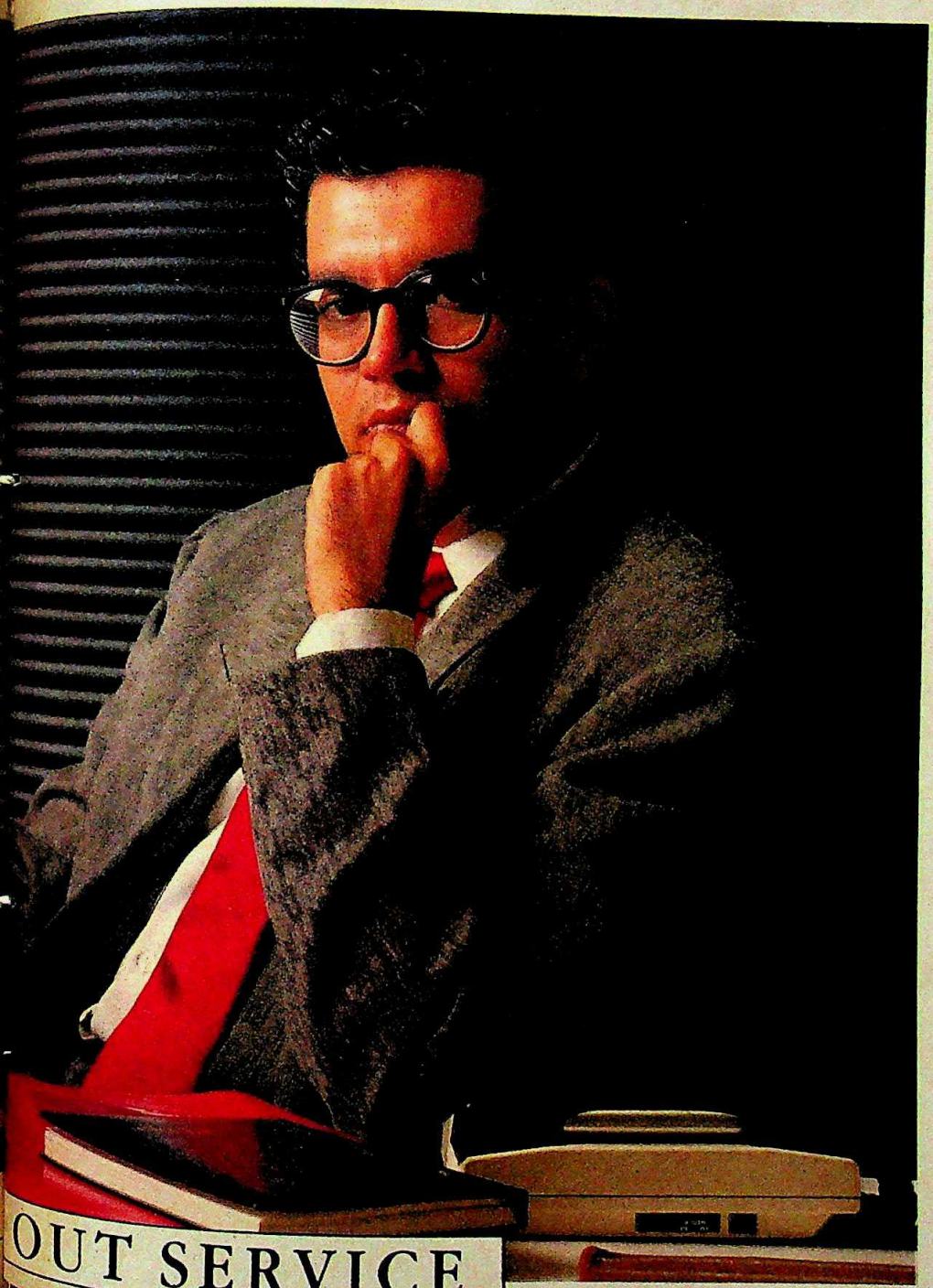
their day at noon, a hotel that thinks likewise.



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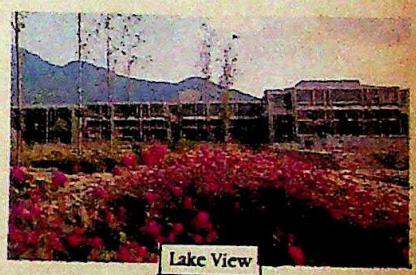

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RAJIV GANDHI

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L DILEMMA

IT'S not just winter that's in the air. There is also a touch of heat. All across the country, in mofussil towns, in state capitals, on village chawpaals, in the smoke-filled backrooms where politicians huddle and in Delhi's never-ending cocktail circuits, the mercury of the nation's political thermometer has been soaring. And the single most important element fuelling the heated atmosphere is the widespread debate on whether Rajiv Gandhi will reach for the snap poll. On this the prime minister has been receiving conflicting advice. Senior bureaucrats who enjoy his confidence have been arguing forcefully in favour of it while most politicians now appear to stand opposed.

During the past few weeks Rajiv has made several noncommittal pronouncements on the subject which have only served to heighten speculation and put senior party members in a cold sweat. When confronted by reporters on the subject last fortnight, he replied: "Why should I issue any clarifications or make an announcement either way? While I don't see the need for a snap poll I will not rule it out either." Perfectly on the fence. But a general election, three, four, five months from now is not something that the ruling party politicians can take lightly, especially when the battlefield is fraught with uncertainty, the party fabric is stretching, the leader's image is far from being at its best, and the Opposition has blood-thirst written across its bared fangs.

And that is precisely the point. During calmer, politically happier times there are no reasons to air snap poll talk. And if Rajiv has waffled on the issue he has done so deliberately. In times of uncertainty you've got to keep others guessing too, especially your own partymen. But tactics such as these are not the only reason for the high-level whispering, denials and renewed hints about early poll possibilities. There are other genuine, pressing compulsions that a party leader can afford to ignore only at his own peril. The arguments favouring and against a quick poll are equally persuasive, and solidly grounded in realpolitik, political mathematics and the equations of power.

So it is not without reason that the *chawpaals* and backrooms resound with furious debate and intelligent guesswork on the issue. And it is also not without

BHAWAN SINGH

THOSE FOR AN EARLY POLL ARGUED THAT THE OPPOSITION WAS IN DISARRAY, THE BOFORS ISSUE DEAD, AND THE ECONOMY IN GOOD SHAPE. STRIKE, THEY URGED, TAKE THE PLUNGE.

Rajiv Gandhi: hitting the trail, but doubts persist

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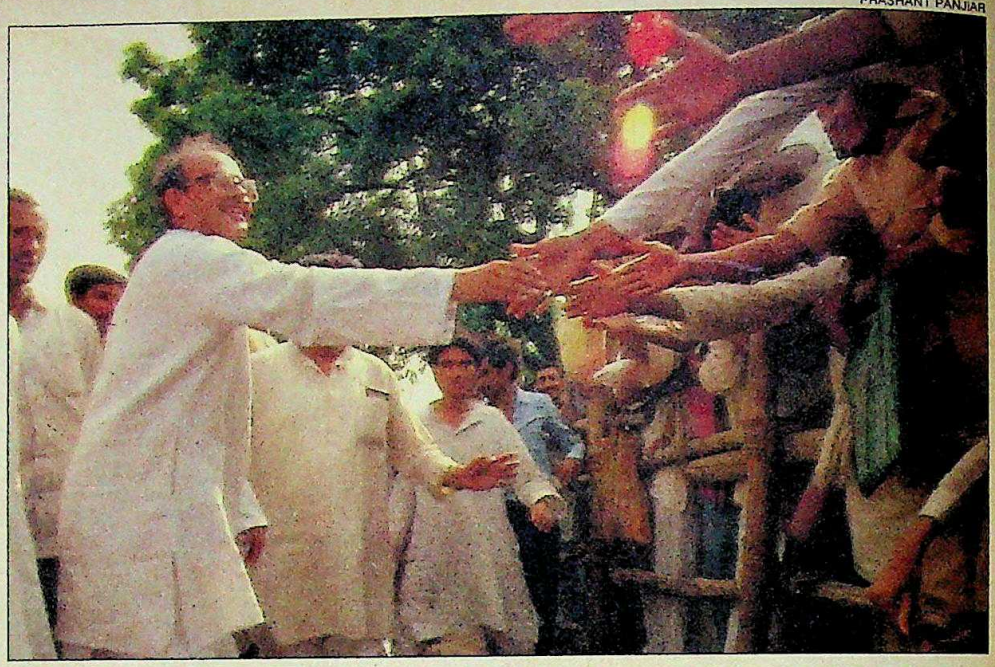
IF THE POLLS TURN OUT TO BE A PERSONALITY CONTEST BETWEEN RAJIV AND V.P. SINGH, QUESTIONS WILL SURFACE: WHO IS CLEANER? MORE CAPABLE?

PRASHANT PANJIAR



V.P. Singh in Allahabad: obvious alternative

reason that the talk of advancing the poll started within the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Several months ago, technical reports compiled by bureaucrats from raw data obtained by local intelligence units spread across the states and spadework done by district Congress(I) committees indicated that even in the best of circumstances Rajiv's party would return by a considerably reduced majority. But these reports also indicated that the importance of the Bofors issue as a political weapon in the hands of the Opposition was diminishing and an early poll could be to the party's advantage. This let loose a wave of political punditry about the pluses and minuses of holding a mid-term poll.

The time for a mid-term poll (not to be confused with a snap poll) came and went. But as a minister of state put it: "The uncertainty still hovers. We realise there will be a diminished majority. But what we have to calculate is what will best limit the damage—an early poll or a late one."

A month ago the political beacon seemed to point in the direction of an early poll. The ruling party had worked itself into an early electoral frenzy, and was on the offensive as never before in every nook and cranny of the country. Gadfly V.P. Singh was savaged in and out of Parliament. Several of the Pradesh Congress(I) Committees (PCC-I) were given long-overdue face-lifts and their new members were summoned to Delhi and the state capitals and given pep talks by senior ministers and chief ministers.

The prime minister hit the trail. In the course of a single month, he freewheeled through half a dozen states, including east Bihar and his Amethi constituency, trumpeting his party's cause and describing the Opposition as "anti-national" and a "national affront". Last fortnight, he was on the stump for three days in Uttar Pradesh, one in Bihar, two in Tamil Nadu and one in Nagaland. Starting in October, farmers' rallies, with Rajesh Pilot as cheerleader (Congress-I's very own Tikait), were organised in key states including Haryana and Andhra Pradesh. And the party's front organisations like the Sewa Dal and Mahila Congress, normally activated for electioneering, were let loose to organise rallies demanding the prosecution of Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal after his granddaughter-in-law died in a controversial gun accident.

THOUGH there was no election in sight, this was all typical election eve activity. The early poll climate hotted up further when a mammoth AICC(I) session was organised in Delhi overlooked by massive banners of Indira Gandhi—hinting strongly at an electorally-aimed revival—and passed an economic resolution that was pure populism. Though no formal discussions about a mid-term poll took place, everyone went home with the impression that it was around the corner. Congress chief ministers and PCC(I) chiefs were handed out a time-barred programme for holding district and state level conventions. In the case of non-Congress(I) states the brief was more specific—exploit every issue and organise demonstrations and rallies exposing the misdeeds of NTR, Jyoti Basu, Devi Lal, and Prafulla Mahanta. In addition, over 50 trusted MPs and ministers were packed off to various states to assess the situation. Sheila Dixit, minister of state for parliamentary affairs, held a daily durbar at the PMO of politicians from the states thrashing out their individual problems. The idea was to get the various ministers to clear pending projects. Then the National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural Labour Employment Guarantee Programme were also given a fillip, and are likely to receive about Rs 400 crore more than the budgeted Rs 1,260 crore for this financial year. Unfailingly, the rumour mills began to buzz that Parliament would be dissolved in November and a snap poll ordered in February.

So completely plausible was this scenario that several ruling party MPs from Andhra Pradesh announced the poll date to their constituents and parked themselves at the doors of various high command members seeking tickets.

Between August and November those pressing for an early poll appeared to be winning. Their arguments were impressive. The economy, the industrial climate, they argued were in better shape than ever before *(see accompanying box)* and Rajiv could take full credit for economic management. The overall growth rate promised to go double digit and foodgrain production was poised to hit an all-time

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high at 170 million tonnes. The bad monsoon years were a distant memory. So why wait. Strike while the iron is hot, they urged, take the plunge.

AND Rajiv, one aide said, was advised that an early poll should be treated like a no trumps game in bridge—cut your losses as quickly as you can but keep the stoppers. And much of this advice came from the top rungs of the bureaucracy. As one senior civil servant put it: "The major compulsion for an early poll is that Rajiv is being viewed as a lame duck prime minister. He started well but now nothing is moving. No one is willing to take decisions in any ministry. The train has begun to move from the platform. He has got to jump onto it and quickly."

The view that prevailed in the civil service as well as some ministerial quarters was that the only way for Rajiv to salvage his and his party's battered image was to risk a quick poll, accept even a drastically reduced majority, and make a come-back. In this eventuality he would be in a strong position to sweep clean the stables of his party, recast it in his own image, and get on with the business of a faster working government. In other words: recapture the dynamism of 1985. There were other reasons, purely strategic:

► A quick election would prevent the opposition's unity efforts from jelling. Before it could even formally come together and select its office-bearers, it would be thrown into a mad scramble for tickets.

► The longer the prime minister waited for the general election, the more time there would be for newspapers and politicians to unravel more corruption charges with concomitantly more time for the electorate to absorb them. Right now Bofors, though an irritant, was politically manageable. Given another year, it might not be. Besides, given another year, might not the Opposition develop other themes with powerful electoral value?

► Then the question of troublesome chief ministers who are carving out their own empires. The most prominent being Arjun Singh in Madhya Pradesh and Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra. Delaying elections would allow them to consolidate their empires further and be in a position to bargain with the prime minister about tickets and even cabinet berths, weakening his position even more.

► And, of course, the all-important question of the image of the leader. Many of Rajiv's close supporters readily admit that his aura of cleanliness and his credibility have suffered. His hand at the helm has appeared to be unsteady. And for the first time since Independence there is a clear alternative in V.P. Singh. And the alternative has gained mileage as a prime ministerial alternative after the ruling party singled him out for unprecedented abuse in Parliament. That gave him both publicity and a pedestal—as did the Janata to Mrs Gandhi when she was out of power. V.P. Singh is sceptical about the chances of a snap poll: "The prime minister is afraid of facing the people. Since he is inconsistent, illogical and indecisive, he will stick to the chair at every cost and use every method—honest or dishonest to retain it." And the elections are bound to turn into a personality contest between Rajiv and V.P. Singh in which the ques-

ECONOMY

Poll Populism

WITH the whiff of elections in the air, it's *roti, kapda, makan* time again. And economic populism is here once more. A new employment guarantee scheme for the rural poor is on the anvil and there is a move to integrate mid-day meals with existing welfare schemes for children. The All India Congress(I) Committee has also promised a dhoti and sari for every poor family. Perfectly fine. But where is the money going to come from?

Barely a month after the promises, came the official calculations. The Government can, at best, make a half-hearted attempt at implementing such grandiose welfare programmes. That too, only by sinking the country deeper into debt, a prospect that may not particularly daunt Rajiv Gandhi.

But can such a strategy revive his sagging image? Clothes do not necessarily buy votes, nor do promises of employment. Still, the wooing of voters continues in earnest. The arithmetic is, however, startling: even if the Government tries to partially implement the AICC economic resolutions, it will draw at least Rs 6,000 crore from the exchequer, planners have calculated. This kind of money is simply not there.

Look at the sums. What would it cost to provide 50 days' work—assume a low Rs 25 per manday—to one member of 100 million families? A stupendous Rs 12,500 crore! The cost of doling 550 million metres of cloth would be less at Rs 500 crore, but the logistics are mind-boggling. Says Congress(S) leader K.P. Unnikrishnan: "At best, a couple of sick public sector textile mills may offload their unsold stocks."

The country is already crushed under a mountain of debt. Undoubtedly, the current year's budget deficit will be above the estimated Rs 8,000 crore. But Rajiv seems confident he can gamble next year's budget on the monsoon. He may be right. As a government economist points out: "A bad monsoon in 1989 will not matter because its impact will be felt only around November." Economics does not influence the course of politics in the short run: it only provides slogans which may not work. "Even Congressmen realise that loan melas can help them that much and no more," says Madhu Dandavate.

Ruling party men too are wary of the negative implications of populism in the long run. "The compulsions of an election year should not force the Government to fiscal profligacy," says N.K.P. Salve, chairman, Ninth Finance Commission. A Planning Commission member fears that populist schemes may cut into the allocations for other crucial sectors. "Railways and the coal sector need at least Rs 800 crore of investment next year," he says. "Or else the infrastructure will not permit higher rates of industrial production."

But poll pressures may cast such considerations by the wayside. Inflationary pressures are very strong despite the record harvest this year. Any housewife will testify to it, irrespective of what the Government's wholesale price index claims. The trade deficit shows no signs of narrowing, in spite of low world prices of crude oil and edible oil, the two largest items of import. Nor is there any likelihood of the country's foreign exchange reserves swelling.

Rajiv seems unconcerned by the revenue deficit that could touch Rs 15,000 crore in 1989-90—making prices sky rocket. The next budget will try pleasing everybody. It's a separate matter that it may finally end up pleasing nobody.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA

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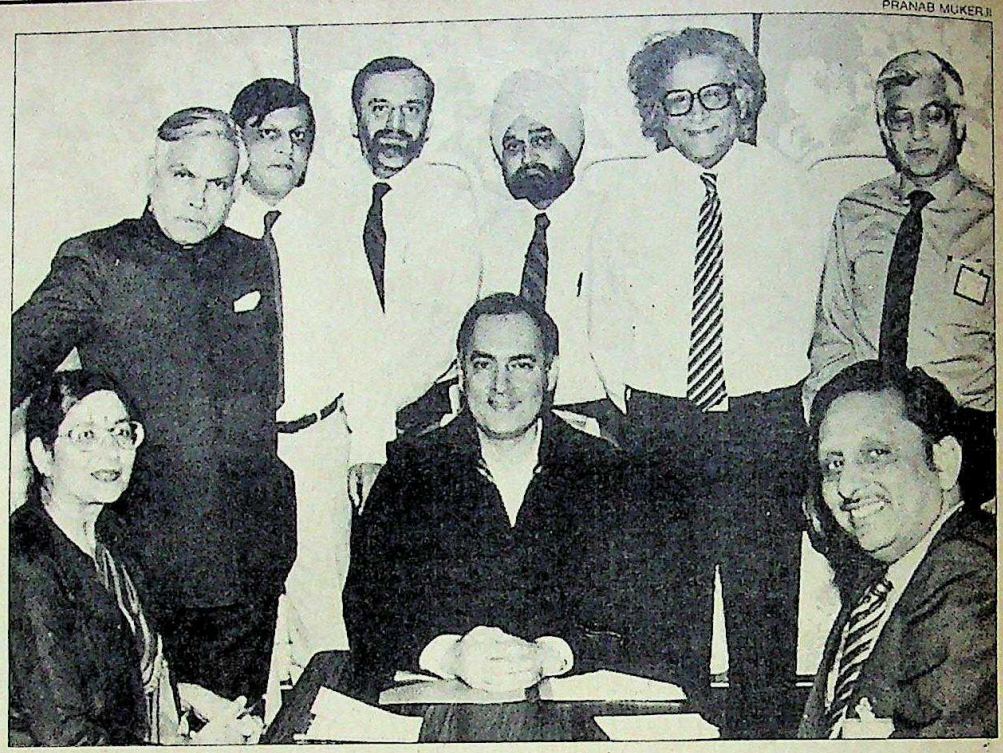
THE DEBATE AMONG RAJIV'S CLOSE ADVISORS HAS BEEN FIERCE: WILL DELAY RESTORE OR SERVE TO FURTHER DAMAGE THE PRIME MINISTER'S CHANCES?

PRANAB MUKERJI



Rajiv flanked by close advisors: elusive consensus

tions of who is cleaner, more mature, and a more capable administrator, will surface.

The judgement call on the image issue is a particularly difficult one to make. The crucial factor here is whether the passage of time will improve or further tarnish Rajiv's image. Commented a member of Parliament attached to the Congress Working Committee: "To build up the image he had in 1985 will require more than just a year. Our concern is it should not be further damaged. The longer the period before the elections, the more steps he takes, the more chances of his doing wrong things. The Defamation Bill, and what he said in his recent magazine interview, were just two ill-advised steps, but look how much they cost him. I think an early election should be called."

But the detractors have been growing. The above reckoning is all predicated on a respectable showing in Tamil Nadu *(see page 60)* as well as on the favourable outcome of major initiatives of Rajiv abroad—Sri Lanka, his dealings with Benazir Bhutto, his performance at the forthcoming SAARC conference and, of course, the China visit. These several reasons make the risk of a snap poll—after the January Tamil Nadu elections (also Nagaland and Mizoram)—well worth taking, say quick-poll protagonists.

Those urging caution, restraint and waiting a year include some of Rajiv's influential advisors. Sam Pitroda firmly believes that notwithstanding opinion polls, solid gains have been made by the Government and more time is needed to consolidate support and translate it into votes. He notes: "There have been no quick fixes but there have been positive initiatives and people will begin to appreciate them as time goes by."

In one new initiative undertaken by the Government thousands of volunteers have been assigned to villages to study and list the major irritants faced by villagers. The results show that obtaining of ration cards, the food distribution system, and banking procedures, top the list. Efforts are underway to establish mobile "grievance stations" in every district. They will serve a vital electoral purpose.

There are other reasons against a poll being conducted before summer. Voting rights are given to people reaching their 21st year by January 1. About 10 million voters will be added. The process of roll revision takes four months. More will be added under the electoral reform bill lowering the voting age to 18. But if Rajiv still wants an earlier poll, he can do so by ensuring that the revisions are expedited.

Also, the PMO has now begun to receive the feedback on the activities of the Congress pradesh and district committees as well as that of local politicians. And the news is grim. Apart from the crowds that have been drummed up for Rajiv's rallies, attendance at rallies sponsored by the PCC(I) and ministers has been poor throughout the land. And, according to high command officials in New Delhi, new PCC(I) chiefs—Balram Yadav in Uttar Pradesh, Chandulal Chandrakar in Madhya Pradesh, Kelucharan Lenka in Orissa, and Veerendra Patil in Karnataka—have proven to be non-starters.

Of course, some like AICC(I) General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad exude a confidence that's transparently fake bravura. Says he: "We are prepared to take on the Opposition. We are not afraid of going to the people anytime." The fact is that the Congress(I) has discovered to its horror, thanks to diligent investigations undertaken in preparation of a possible early poll, that the party is simply not geared up to fight an election even if it wanted to right now. It is for this reason that the civic poll in Delhi has been repeatedly postponed. Moreover, there was little to no party activity during the elections for pradhans and pramukhs in the panchayat elections held recently. In 606 municipal elections just conducted in Uttar Pradesh, the majority of candidates, even if backed by the Congress(I), did not campaign on the party symbol: the party was in no position to provide them any organisational support. And in several constituencies, opposition candidates outmuscled, outspent and out-organised

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Congress(I)-backed candidates at the polling booths. Several ruling party leaders who made complaints about booth-capturing by the Opposition also noted that the bureaucracy, at least at the lower rungs of the administration, was not favourably inclined towards them.

WHILE the panchayat elections produced a mixed bag of results, the municipal elections indicated that there was a wave—at least in semi-urban areas and market towns—against candidates associated with the ruling party. Opposition-backed candidates ran away with about 51 per cent of the seats. The party's own intelligence reports show that of its 400-odd district committees, 230 are completely inactive. And post-mortem reports of the Allahabad by-election debacle point to an absence of even the most elemental organisation. For example, of some 800 polling booths, 290 were not even manned by Congress(I) agents. Allahabad also showed that the ruling party's traditional Muslim vote bank could not be taken for granted any more. The Uttar Pradesh municipal elections too showed that while Muslims voted as a block, they did not necessarily support ruling party-backed candidates.

Another disturbing feature, sufficient to give pause to the early election supporters, is the reluctance of Congress(I) chief ministers to go out on a limb and hold massive rallies and attack their opponents in pre-electoral fashion. Most of them have been sitting on their haunches or are faced with enervating dissident activity. In Rajasthan dissidents are asking for the removal of Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur and PCC(I) chief Ashok Gehlot. In Maharashtra dissident MLAs have produced a white paper against Pawar. The state of the states, reports to the Centre say, is not encouraging. INDIA TODAY assesses some key states:

■ **Andhra Pradesh:** The Congress(I) has improved its position slightly since 1983. But the National Front Chairman and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao remains supremely confident. "We are ever-ready," he says, "to trounce the Congress in any election." The state's Congress(I) favours the election on schedule. Says the new Pradesh Congress chief N. Janardhan Reddy: "We are aware of our strength. But it has to be organised and channelised."

■ **Bihar:** The state which has always given the Centre a case of political jitters is doing so once again. Dissident leader Jagannath Mishra has now formed what appears to be a parallel organisation that can only hurt the ruling party. Says Lallu Prasad Yadav, leader of the Lok Dal group in the Assembly: "There is no chance of a snap poll because the Congress(I), fearing a total rout, would never commit this mistake."

The Congress(I)'s greatest advantage in Bihar is the Opposition's inability to field a leader of any consequence. This vacuum could now well be filled by Mishra. Confided the state Congress(I) chief Tariq Anwar: "Infighting will definitely weaken party chances in the state."

Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad however declares confidently: "We are surging forward." But the public mood, local Congressmen admit, is anti-Congress. Says dissident Kamalnath Singh Thakur: "If elections are held under the present leadership (Azad's), 1977 will be repeated." Bihar is viewed by its own people as the worst-administered state in the country and so far the Congress(I) has been able to offer nothing to them as an election plank.

■ **Haryana:** Apart from the fact that Devi Lal still holds the state in his charismatic grip, the ruling party is inherently disadvantaged by the continuing Bhajan Lal-Bansi Lal feud. Both leaders have been holding election-type rallies across the state—but separately. This has so disturbed the high command that it despatched General Secretary K.N. Singh to Panipat last month where he met party office-bearers of all the district and constituency committees and admonished them to work unitedly. Singh asked the PCC(I) chief Balbir Pal Shah to issue a circular forbidding all public meetings organised by individual leaders without

THE PICTURE EMERGING IS OF AN AGGRESSIVE RAJIV BUT AN ILL-PREPARED CONGRESS(I) FACING A RIVEN, BUT EQUALLY AGGRESSIVE OPPOSITION.

Opposition rally at Agra: riven yet powerful

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the high command's sanction. Moreover, the National Front and the BJP seem better organised than the Congress(I) and have been holding well-attended rallies.

■ **Karnataka:** For a man whose government has been ravaged by dissidence and who is unsure of how long he will be in power, Karnataka Chief Minister, S.R. Bommai, has chalked up a significant record: in the less than four months he has been in office, the stolid Bommai has quietly slipped out of Bangalore time and again, visiting seven of the state's 19 outlying districts. He has been addressing rallies and meeting party workers at a frenetic pace. This gives the Janata a flying start over the Congress(I).

PCC(I) chief Veerendra Patil has warned partymen that they would be "hardpressed for time" to face the electoral battle, unless they sank their differences immediately. At the same time, Patil has served notice to the high command warning them that unless they clear the party executive committee list he forwarded, he could not begin whipping the party machinery into shape.

■ **Kerala:** Chief Minister E.K. Nayanar doubts that a snap poll will be called, but adds confidently: "Our party and the LDF is ready for it and we will definitely rout the Congress(I)." So the CPI(M) in Kerala is getting ready for its big show, the 13th Party Congress in Trivandrum in the last week of December, where the party's poll strategy will be spelled out.

Kerala Pradesh Congress chief A.K. Antony doubts the wisdom of calling a snap poll. His reasons are the same as those given by other leaders—the party is not ready. And its main electoral strategy—campaigning against what it calls the misdeeds of the Nayanar Government—requires time and persistence to bring to fruition.

■ **Gujarat:** A majority of the senior Congress(I) leaders in Gujarat do not expect a snap poll. Says Chief Minister Amarsinh Chaudhary: "If even part of the resolution adopted by the AICC(I), relating to lowering of the voting age, women's welfare and changes in the economic policies is accepted, it will take at least one year to implement."

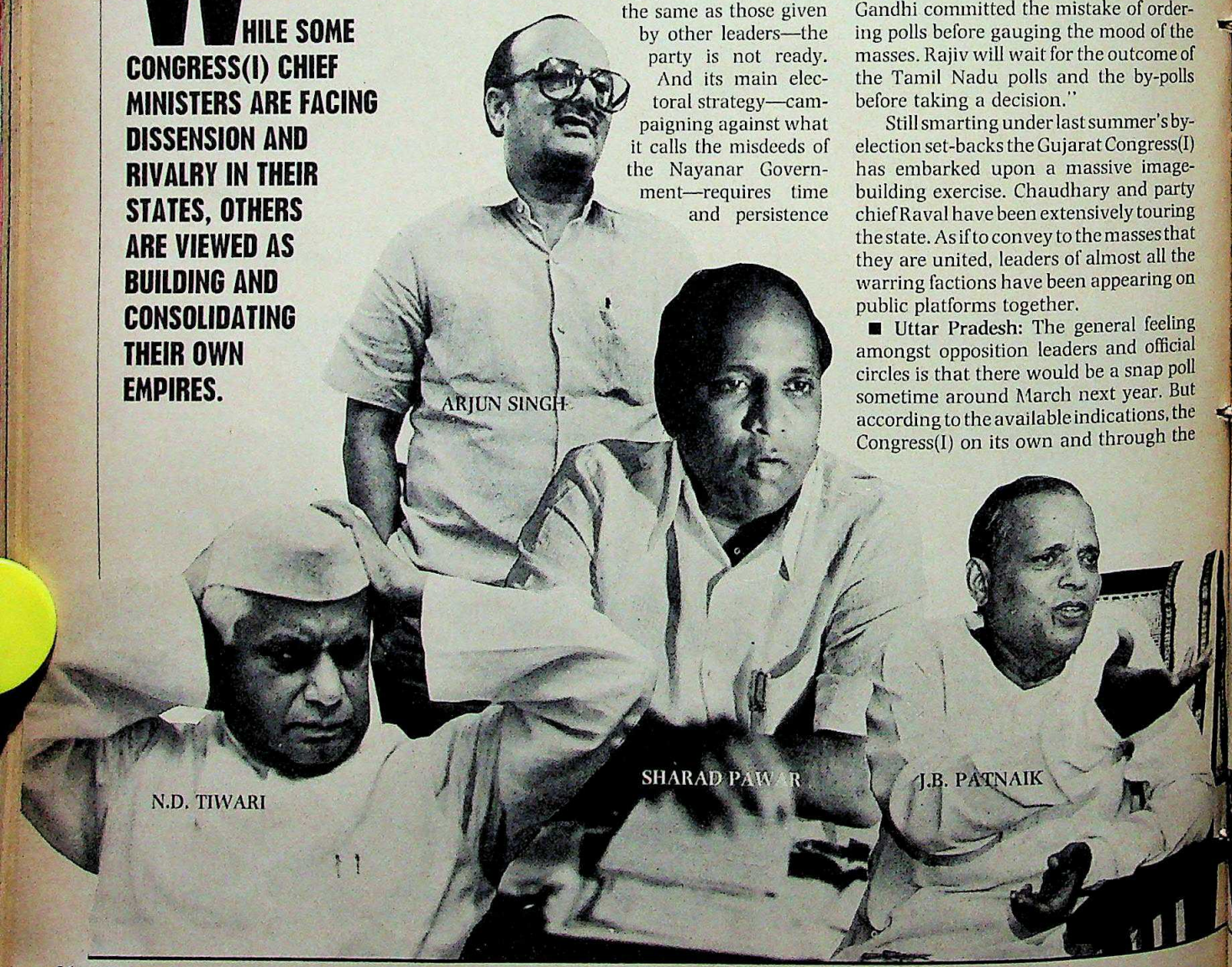
Others do not rule out the possibility of a snap poll. As one says: "The coming elections in Tamil Nadu and Nagaland and the by-election to be held in eight states will be an acid test for us. If we come out with flying colours, Rajiv may order a snap poll in April or May. But if we fail, he may even push the scheduled election further back."

But they too feel the snap poll would not be held along with the election in Tamil Nadu. Says a leader: "The experience of 1977 is still fresh. Then, Mrs Gandhi committed the mistake of ordering polls before gauging the mood of the masses. Rajiv will wait for the outcome of the Tamil Nadu polls and the by-polls before taking a decision."

Still smarting under last summer's by-election set-backs the Gujarat Congress(I) has embarked upon a massive image-building exercise. Chaudhary and party chief Raval have been extensively touring the state. As if to convey to the masses that they are united, leaders of almost all the warring factions have been appearing on public platforms together.

■ **Uttar Pradesh:** The general feeling amongst opposition leaders and official circles is that there would be a snap poll sometime around March next year. But according to the available indications, the Congress(I) on its own and through the

WHILE SOME CONGRESS(I) CHIEF MINISTERS ARE FACING DISSENSION AND RIVALRY IN THEIR STATES, OTHERS ARE VIEWED AS BUILDING AND CONSOLIDATING THEIR OWN EMPIRES.



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Government is still gauging the mood of the people. It is plainly ill-prepared.

Says UPCC(I) Joint Secretary O.P. Jindal: "Why should we hold a mid-term poll? We have a majority and we have a stable government." Party leaders feel the the schisms in the Opposition would further widen with time. The best tactic, they say, is to give the Opposition enough rope with which to hang itself.

But right now it is the Congress(I) grassroots organisation—the UPCC(I)—that is dangling uselessly. DCC(I)s have been reconstituted in only 11 districts. And opposition leaders claim that they stand ready to take full advantage of the ruling party's weaknesses. Says Dhirendra Sahai, former general secretary of Lok Dal (A), now in the united Janata Party: "The Opposition will unite as they know that individually no party would stand anywhere."

■ **West Bengal:** Here, the hint of a snap poll from the Centre has had the tonic effect of making the state's parties more aggressive, and the growing differences between the Left Front partners are rapidly being shelved in an effort to provide a wall of unity against the Congress(I).

The CPI(M), the biggest party, has been the most aggressive. In its preparations for the state party conference which began on December 3, senior party leaders went out of their way to address public meetings called at the end of district level party meetings. In these meetings, mostly attended by Jyoti Basu, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Biman Bose, Benoy Krishna Choudhury amongst others, the CPI(M)'s main refrain was the Congress(I) conspiracy to dislodge the Left Front. Cadres have also been told to renew the campaign demanding Rajiv Gandhi's resignation.

With a change in PCC(I) leadership and the installation of A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, activity in the Opposition has automatically increased. Choudhury made his stand clear: "I am not worried about infighting. My sole task is to woo the people and free them from the CPI(M) terror." Though Choudhury is yet even to form his committees he has begun organising mass meetings. The PCC(I) chief addresses on an average four to five meetings every week in the districts and is presently trying to instil confidence amongst the people.

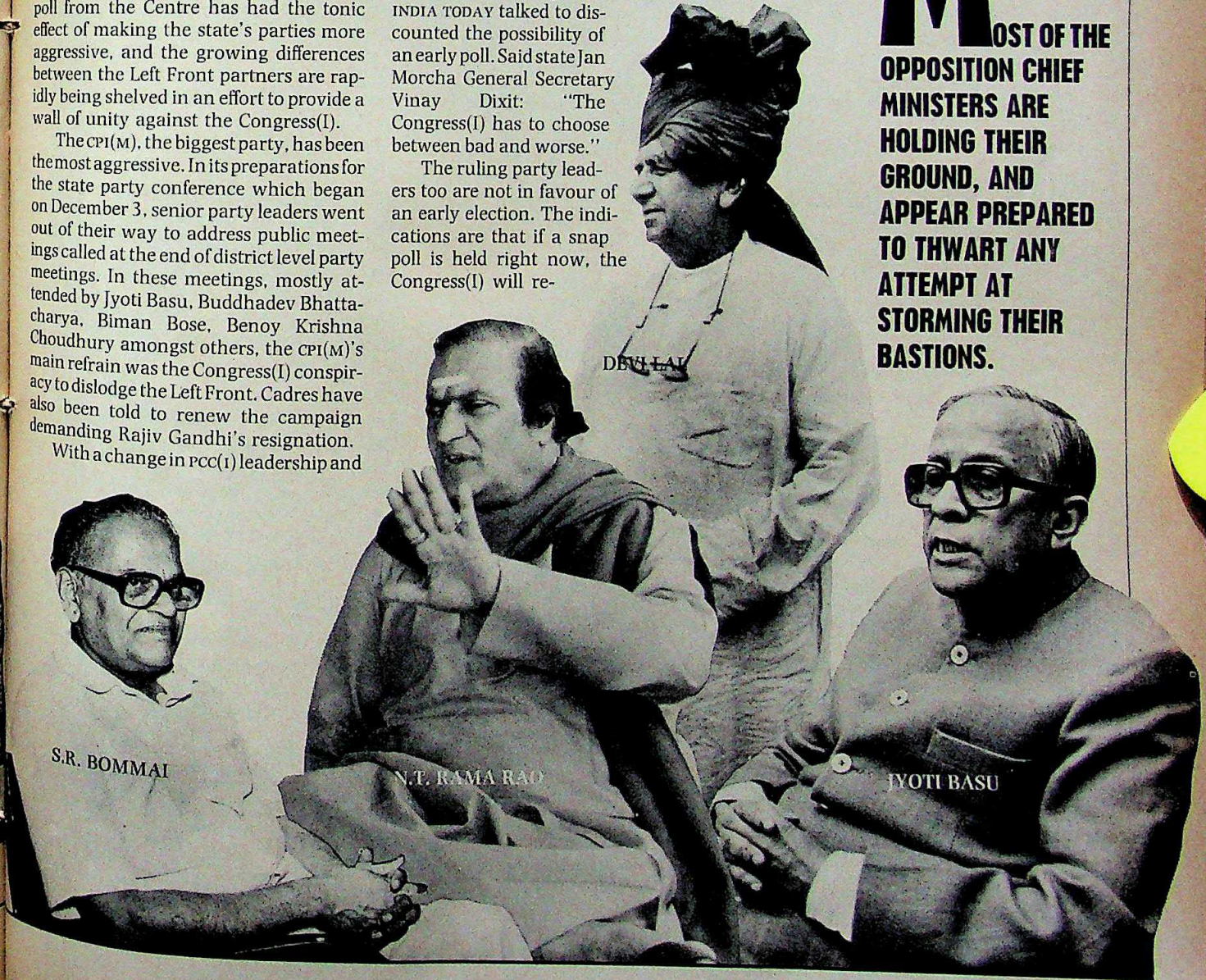
■ **Madhya Pradesh:** Although all major political parties in Madhya Pradesh are in readiness for a snap poll, there are very few pointers to indicate such a possibility. The two major political forces in the state, the ruling Congress(I) party, and its principal challenger, the BJP, have been flexing their muscles ever since Arjun Singh came into power last February.

Most of the politicians INDIA TODAY talked to discounted the possibility of an early poll. Said state Jan Morcha General Secretary Vinay Dixit: "The Congress(I) has to choose between bad and worse."

The ruling party leaders too are not in favour of an early election. The indications are that if a snap poll is held right now, the Congress(I) will receive a drubbing. It is badly divided. Chief Minister Arjun Singh, who is supposed to lead the party to victory at the hustings, is drawing a very poor response. His last month's well-publicised public meeting at Sagar was one of the worst ever addressed by any chief minister in recent times. What was even more disturbing to the ruling party was that a huge crowd awaited V.P. Singh till 2 a.m. when he went to Raigarh during his last fortnight's tour of Chhattisgarh region.

The picture that emerges is of an ill-prepared Congress(I) facing a loosely-knit but better prepared opposition. Small wonder then that the ruling party is in a

MOST OF THE OPPOSITION CHIEF MINISTERS ARE HOLDING THEIR GROUND, AND APPEAR PREPARED TO THWART ANY ATTEMPT AT STORMING THEIR BASTIONS.



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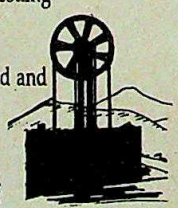

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state of panicky indecision. Also hanging over its head like a political guillotine are 49 by-elections—eleven to the Lok Sabha and the rest to state assemblies—all over the country. They were scheduled for November but the Congress persuaded the Election Commission to postpone them until February. The high command is seeking a further postponement but the commission has refused to budge.

Now their further postponement has become a necessity for the Congress(I). The by-elections will be critical. If the ruling party loses the bulk of them—and early reports indicate this is likely because the seats being contested are traditionally opposition holdings—its image will take a battering. The general election, then, would certainly be up for grabs.

The Congress(I) now hopes to defer the by-elections by lowering the voting age to 18 through legislation. This would necessitate a massive revision of voters lists, enough to buy them three or four months of time. But if the by-elections are held in February then it is possible to construe a sorry scenario for the ruling party, one that may have a snowballing effect. January—lose Tamil Nadu, Nagaland, Mizoram; February—lose the bulk of the 49 by-elections setting the stage for high-level defections from the party; and December—stand face to face with near certain defeat in the general elections.

Not at all a rosy picture. And it grays some more when Rajiv's electoral record of the past three years is considered. Out of 56 Lok Sabha by-elections held since the last parliamentary poll, the Congress(I) could win only 26. Of the 94 assembly by-elections held, it won 43. And though the party managed to win in Nagaland and Tripura, it did so only with the massive use of money and muscle. Since April 1985, Rajiv has been bested in all the major contests—Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Haryana, and Kerala.

AND at the moment the ruling party even lacks a slogan like the catchy one of 1985: "A government that works faster." And Rajiv Gandhi still remains the only national-level campaigner for the party. His time and energies are going to be stretched as never before. He will be required to campaign all over the country and for this reason alone—because of the sheer time required—he is unlikely to take any hasty poll decision.

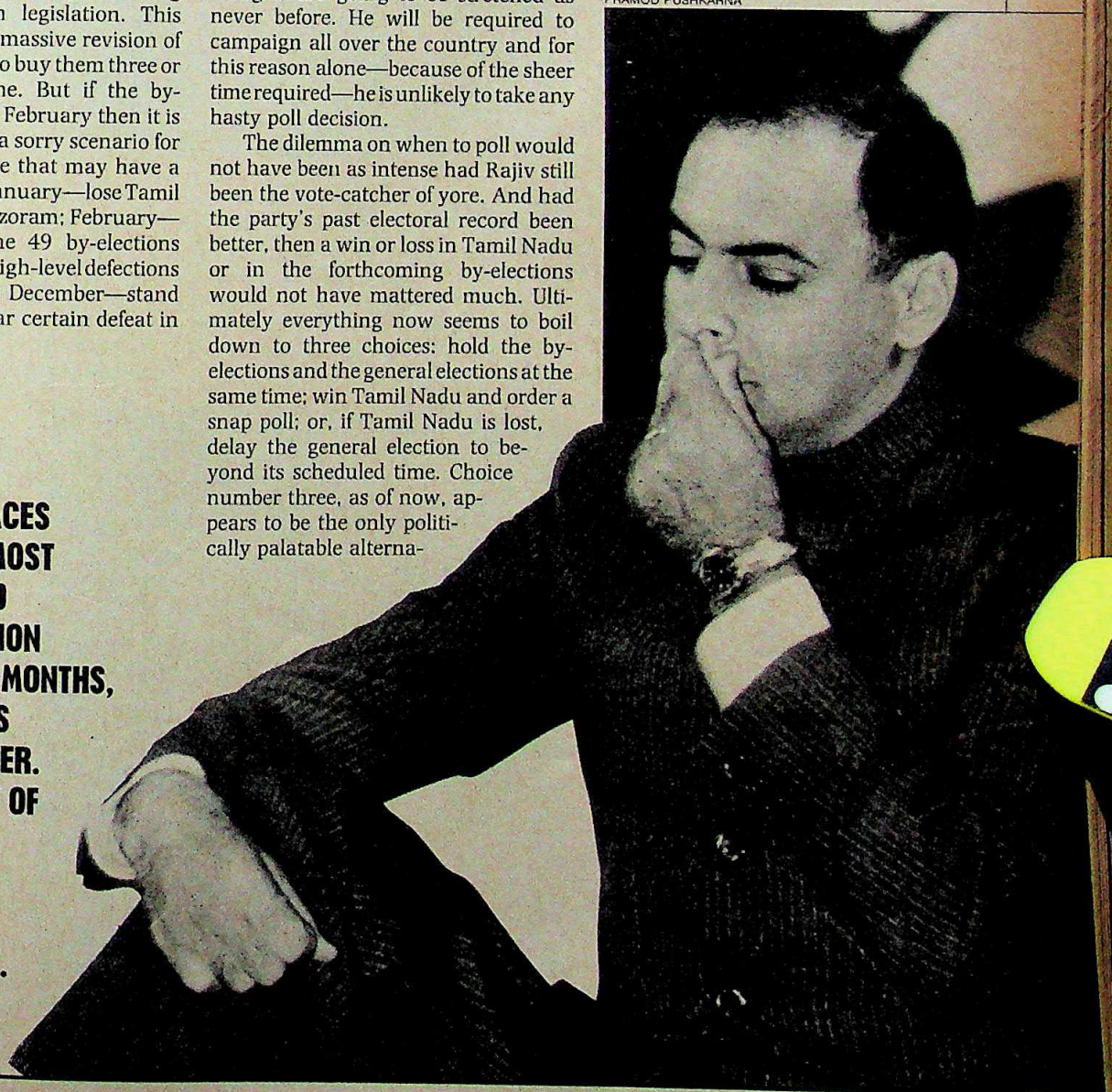
The dilemma on when to poll would not have been as intense had Rajiv still been the vote-catcher of yore. And had the party's past electoral record been better, then a win or loss in Tamil Nadu or in the forthcoming by-elections would not have mattered much. Ultimately everything now seems to boil down to three choices: hold the by-elections and the general elections at the same time; win Tamil Nadu and order a snap poll; or, if Tamil Nadu is lost, delay the general election to beyond its scheduled time. Choice number three, as of now, appears to be the only politically palatable alternative for Rajiv.

For him it is a piquant moment. And perhaps he faces the single most important decision not only of the coming months, but also of his political career. He, more than others in his party, has a personal stake in the outcome of the election. If he loses, his enemies are bound to unleash personal vendettas against him and his family. And Rajiv is not the kind of savvy streetfighter that Sanjay was, nor the hardened politician that was his mother. Notwithstanding his recent speeches that have been laced with invective, at heart he remains an officer and a gentleman. The decision will ultimately be his alone and it will be a lonely moment for him. But, important above all, it will be the ultimate test of his political instincts.

—INDERJIT BADHWAR and
PRABHU CHAWLA with bureau reports

RAJIV FACES NOT ONLY THE MOST IMPORTANT AND CRITICAL DECISION OF THE COMING MONTHS, BUT ALSO OF HIS POLITICAL CAREER. A CRUCIAL TEST OF HIS SURVIVAL INSTINCTS, IT IS FOR HIM A LONELY MOMENT.

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



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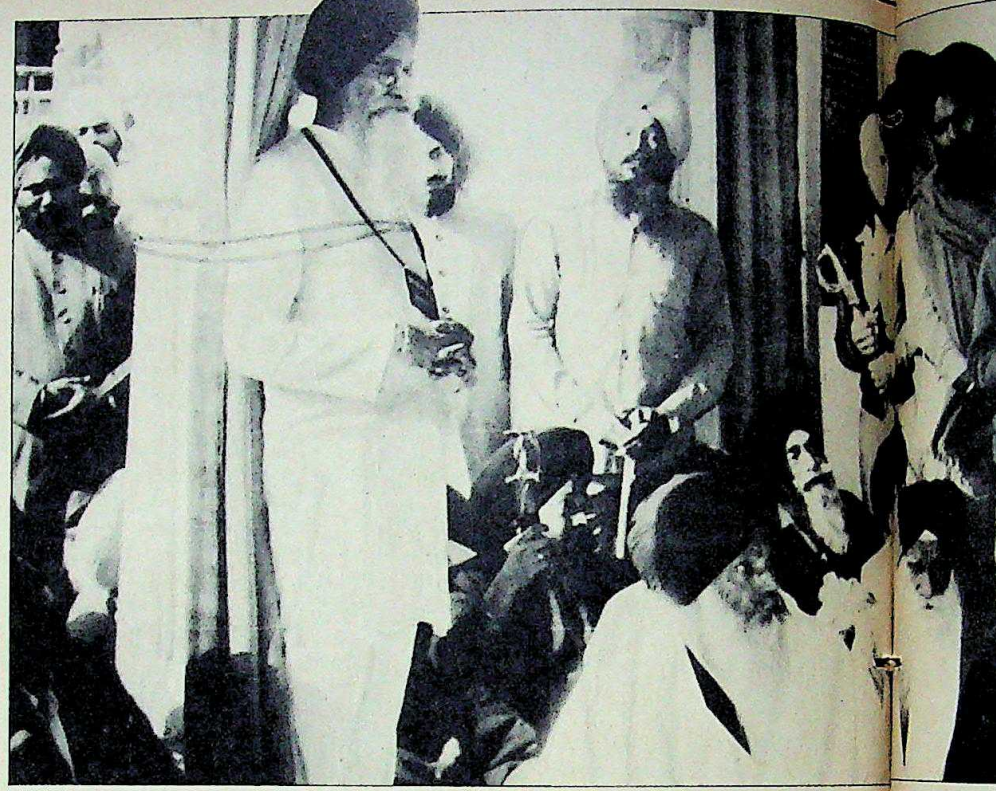
PUNJAB

Clergy Strikes Back

Barnala's recent pantomime of penance was reminiscent of the irrationalities of a medieval theocracy. The drama made it clear yet again that Punjab's agony remains a long way off from amelioration.



EVEN to a nation inured to the fundamentalist absurdities of Punjab, the chastisement of former state chief minister Surjit Singh Barnala at the hands of the Sikh clergy last fortnight came as a rude shock. The startling photographs running across the front pages of newspapers—Barnala lashed to a pillar; Barnala gamely cleaning devotees' shoes—were a grim reminder of the brutal medievalism that underlies Punjab politics. For the Akalis it also answered dramatically the crucial question of mixing religion and politics—they would continue to be inextricable, for both were tools to the attainment of power.

Power: that was essentially all that the drama in Amritsar was about. The head priests were less interested in religious punishment than in a reassertion of their authority. And Barnala—ostensibly atoning for his defiance of an Akal Takht directive last year, which rendered him excommunicated—was really only angling to get himself and his family back into the reckoning in Sikh politics.

Ironically, the man who handed out the penance and rehabilitation to Barnala was the very same who had pronounced him excommunicated. Darshan Singh Ragi, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)-backed Akal Takht jathedar (one of several claimants to the post), had in February 1987 been foiled in his Akali unity efforts by Barnala who had refused to dissolve the Longowal faction of the Akali Dal which he headed. Then, Barnala, withstanding the excommunication, had asserted that the priests ought not to interfere in politics. He had become a symbol of the bulwarks against fundamentalism.

RUBY MADAN

Barnala tied to a pillar (left); (below) polishing shoes at the Akal Takht

The same Barnala—seeking rehabilitation from the clergy ever since his ouster by the Centre—shame-facedly submitted this month to a humiliating regimen spelled out by the high priests, after having fulfilled Ragi's precondition of resigning the presidentship of the Akali Dal (Longowal). For seven days he had to clean shoes at the entrance of a gurdwara, sweep and mop its floor, and wash utensils at the community kitchen. For the entire 18-day penance period, he had to dangle round-the-clock a black iron plate from his neck, sporting the bold legend: "I am a sinner. May God pardon me." Besides, he had to hold and sit through five non-stop recitals of *Gurbani* lasting 11 days. At the end of it all, in the third quarter of December, he will have to reappear at the Akal Takht and make an offering of Rs 4,400 before he is fi-

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RAVI BHANDARI

nally pardoned.

Ragi's belittling verdict—issued in fiery language, as Barnala stood tied to a pillar, eyes downcast, hands folded—evoked sharp reactions from Sikh politicians of every hue, and even sent shock waves coursing through Akali circles. Said Gurcharan Singh Randhawa, general secretary of the CPI(M): "Barnala has shifted from his earlier stand of ignoring the clergy by surrendering to its primitive authority." The Akalis expectedly kept their protests muted. The general opinion, however, was that the verdict smacked of vindictiveness. The example of Barnala's 1986 excommunication and exoneration was cited as an example.

But the sentenced himself was uncomplaining. Said Barnala: "I accepted the Akal Takht's verdict rather happily because I am basically a religious man." However, there was more to it than merely that. Sources close to him point out that the main reason for Barnala's alacrity was the twin pressure being exercised on him by his family and party members. It is common knowledge that both Barnala's sons, Amandeep and Gagandeep, have political ambitions, but their future in Akali politics would remain bleak till such time as their father was not exonerated.

"The Unified Akali Dal will have to clarify its position vis-a-vis terrorism if it wants unity with us."

KANWALJIT SINGH
former minister, Akali Dal(L)

"It will be easier for Barnala now to hold unity talks with the rival Unified Akali Dal leaders."

BALWANT SINGH
former minister, Akali Dal(L)

(In fact Barnala's wife and son-in-law had twice approached Ragi for a pardon soon after his excommunication.)

The party on the other hand was pressuring Barnala all the while to wash off his stigma for equally simplistic reasons—so that their relevance was restored in mainsteam Sikh politics, and unity efforts with the other Akali factions could make headway. Says former deputy chief minister Balwant Singh: "It will be easier for Barnala now to hold unity talks with the rival Unified Akali Dal (UAD) leaders on equal terms. UAD leaders like Amarinder Singh and Jagdev Singh Talwandi who were so far meeting him secretly will at least do it openly now."

Observers of panthic politics feel Barnala received punishment really not so much for defying the Akal Takht edict, but for frustrating Ragi's unity efforts. Ragi, it is widely felt, was desperate to establish himself as the first ever jathedar to weld the Akalis together. That Ragi was inspired by vengeance is evident from the fact that he has taken no action against the present UAD chief Jagdev Singh Talwandi who removed the Akal Takht-ordained party president Simranjit Singh Mann from the post a few months back. (Ragi had issued a *hukumnama* forbidding anyone other than Mann from calling himself the Akali Dal chief.)

Nor has Ragi been able to muster the courage to excommunicate slain zealot Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's father, Baba Joginder Singh, who has often ridiculed Ragi openly, and continues to back Jasbir Singh Rode as the Akal Takht jathedar. Ragi has conveniently ignored the fact that the Baba still heads a faction of the Akali Dal with impunity, whereas for the same crime Barnala was not only excommunicated but also forced to resign from the post of party president.

A significant outcome of the punishment drama has been that once again the supremacy of the Akal Takht over politicians is being questioned by the politicians who have so far bowed in subservience to its authority. So much so that Ragi's own credibility is under a cloud. Says a senior leader of the Longowal Akali Dal: "Throughout his life Ragi

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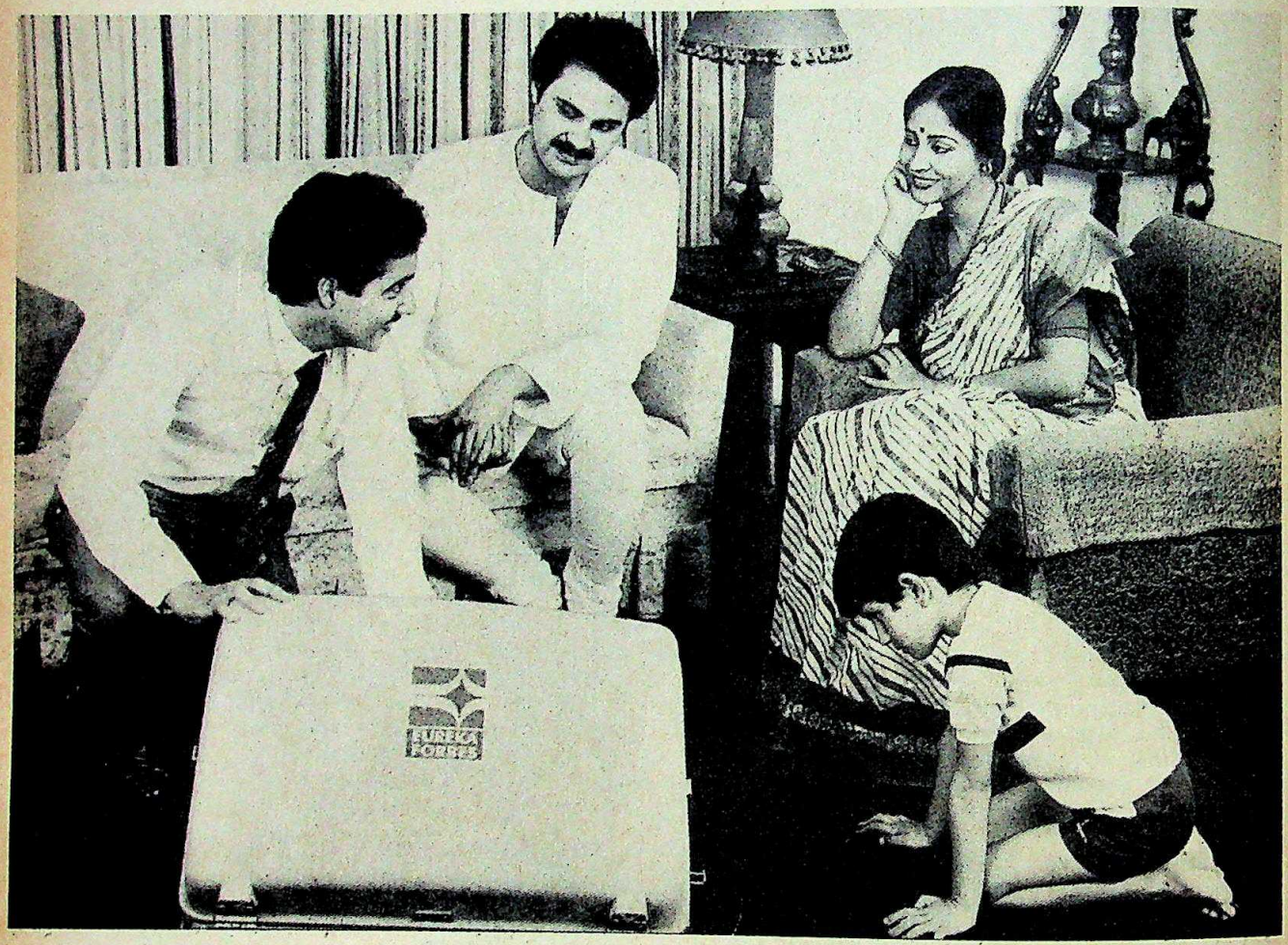

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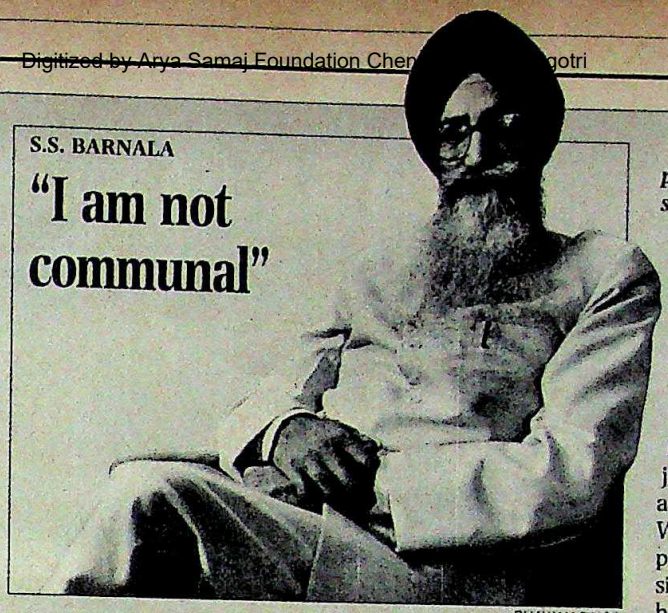
S.S. BARNALA

"I am not communal"



BHAWAN SINGH

For a man undergoing 18 days of rigorous punishment—a few days after being tied to a pillar—Surjit Singh Barnala was remarkably calm and composed. He spoke to INDIA TODAY *at the Gurdwara Gurusar in Chandigarh, while cleaning shoes and utensils. Excerpts:*

Q. What made you submit to the priests?

A. I am not a communal person. But I am deeply religious. I believe in the supremacy of the Akal Takht. I felt it might help in solving many problems, both in the state and the party.

Q. Do you really care for the priests?

A. I do care for everybody there. I can't say anything beyond that.

Q. Don't you think it is high time we separated politics from religion? How would you react to a ban on religious punishments?

A. Who will do it? The Centre can't do it. They themselves start their own politics from religious places. They will get trapped if they attempt to separate the two. Will anyone ask why they're rubbing their noses on the floor of every temple, mosque or church?

Q. There is an attempt to win over the dismissed Akal Takht chief Jasbir Singh Rode, apparently for preparing him to sign another Punjab accord. What do you think?

A. The Government has lost the faith of the people in Punjab. Nobody will believe them even if they sign an accord. The worst thing is that they don't realise it. I hear they are trying to appease another group of extremists, certainly not Rode. I'm not sure but I wouldn't be surprised if it's true.

Q. What would happen if such an accord is signed?

A. We will welcome it if they can bring something better than the last Punjab accord.

Q. Do you think President's rule has been successful?

A. It is not a solution. President's rule in Punjab has been the longest anywhere in the country. We have not seen any positive results so far. The situation has gone from bad to worse.

Q. Do you think the panchayat elections will revive the political process?

A. I don't think so. There are already reports about shady elements threatening likely candidates.

Q. What is the best way of establishing peace in Punjab?

A. Nothing but a political solution. There are irritants that have to be removed. But unfortunately the Government is not taking any steps in that direction. They are sleeping over the Punjab accord. They give the impression that they are not serious about solving the problem.

sold the Guru's words at highly-priced concerts, something strictly forbidden by the first guru, Nanakdev." In a similar vein says another Akali leader: "Ragi never gave a tenth part of his enormous earnings to the gurdwaras, which is an outright violation of Sikhism's basic tenets."

But all this again brings to the fore the major dilemma in Akali politics. The fact that scores of Akali leaders condemn the verdict and yet insist on remaining anonymous manifests clearly their fear of falling foul of religious authority. The truth is that the Akalis want to use religion for political ends, but do not want to be subservient to the clergy. Hence their preference for working out their own beneficial equations with the priests, rather than allowing the Government to force a legislation.

The Government in turn has done little. As a Sikh jurist points out, a simple amendment in the Representation of People's Act and the reservation of election symbols order can easily disqualify church-based organisations and clergymen from fighting elections. Even the religious punishment like the one inflicted on Barnala can be made illegal by amending Section 508 of the IPC which protects citizens from the threat of a forced divine displeasure. But on the contrary, the Government has most of the time been playing foul, steadily worsening matters. Says Gurbir Singh, a former general secretary of the state Congress(I): "The subversions of the democratic process, and the manipulation of the SGPC leadership by people like Buta Singh and S.S. Ray created a void which was filled by religious forces."

EMINENT Sikh scholar Professor Attar Singh too is scathing about all the parties concerned. He asserts: "The fact that no Sikh politician worth his salt, Akali or Congressman, is going on record to criticise the Akal Takht verdict is a sad pointer to the ever increasing powers of the priests in Sikh politics."

The fact is that right now with the role of the priests in the Barnala atonement reaching a conclusion, it is the question of unity between the Longowal and Talwandi factions of the Akali Dal that is assuming centre stage. Former Longowal Akali Dal ministers such as Balwant Singh and Prem Singh Chandumajra are all for it, whereas a section led by former home minister Captain Kanwaljit Singh is of the opinion that a merger with the UAD will prove suicidal for the moderates. Says Kanwaljit: "The UAD will have to clarify its position vis-a-vis terrorism if they want unity with us." Barnala himself agrees his exoneration will pave the way for unity. The UAD too after the terrorist attack on Talwandi is open to the idea. But unity in no way means success in the forthcoming panchayat elections. Both Barnala and Talwandi share the apprehension that the terrorists might hijack the polls at gun-point. They might even decide to keep aloof from the entire poll process. And that would mean yet another setback to the normalisation process in the tragedy-marred state.

—VIPUL MUDGAL

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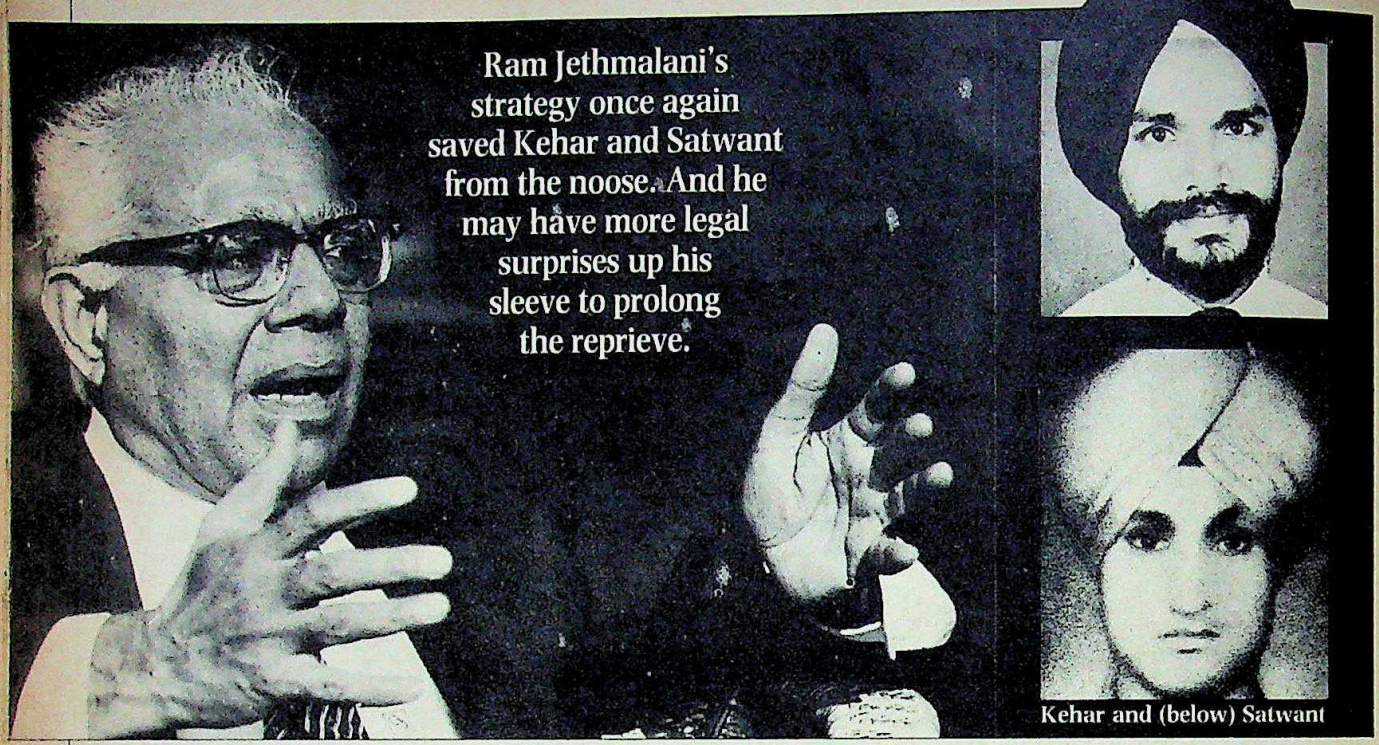

Kehar and (below) Satwant

INDIRA GANDHI ASSASSINATION

Suspended Sentence

In a dramatic anticlimax, the Supreme Court last fortnight stayed the execution of Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh, convicted for the assassination of the late prime minister Indira Gandhi just over four years ago. But subsequent courtroom developments have only shrouded the case in fresh uncertainty. A report:

FOR the first time ever, a black warrant was returned unexecuted not just once but twice, and within a fortnight. It was to be no ordinary execution. Tension had gripped the capital on the first day of the month as news broke that the two men convicted for the assassination of Indira Gandhi were to be hanged at 8 a.m. the next day.

The Delhi Police was placed on a red alert. Security at the city's Tihar Central Jail, where the two have been under closely-guarded solitary confinement, was tightened. Haryana went two steps further, closing schools and colleges throughout the state for the rest of the week and banning all state buses from entering Punjab after 5 p.m. In Punjab there was fear of violence as a large section of the Sikh community prepared to mourn the convicts.

But a different sort of surprise was in store: the Supreme Court stayed both hangings in response to separate petitions just 14 hours before the planned execution. The hangings had earlier been stayed on October 18 on a petition which was dismissed since the lawyer had filed it without instructions from the convict.

This time, though, the apex court was willing to listen to the convicts' legal representatives. Senior counsel Ram Jethmalani, arguing on behalf of Kehar Singh, raised constitutional questions over the President's refusal to grant him a hearing. Assassin Satwant Singh had not filed a petition for pardon but had moved the Delhi High Court to record evidence against the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) commandos who had killed his fellow-assassin, Beant Singh, and nearly killed Satwant himself within half-an-hour of the assassination on October 31, 1984. Since he was the only witness, no evidence would remain against the commandos once he was executed. But his hope was yet again cut short late last fortnight as the Delhi High Court turned down his petition leaving him staring at the noose again, unless his lawyers are able to get the Supreme Court to admit a special leave petition against this.

Last August, after four years of investigation, trial and appeals, the Supreme Court condemned Satwant, a former security constable, and Kehar, a former government clerk, to be hanged. Kehar,

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Beant's uncle, was convicted of being a co-conspirator. On November 3, Kehar petitioned the President through Jethmalani for a hearing, saying that the courts had erred and he was innocent. The President answered on November 24 that he could not go into the matter after it had been disposed of by the Supreme Court.

All hope of reprieve had thus vanished for both men by the end of last month. But their lawyers were determined to fight before they allowed their clients to hang. Jethmalani told INDIA TODAY that he was holding out in the hope that "something might come up".

The afternoon of December 1 witnessed high voltage drama as the scene shifted from the Delhi High Court to the Supreme Court. When a division bench of the high court dismissed Jethmalani's impassioned hour-long plea, he rushed to the Supreme Court where a constitution bench was hearing the Carbide case.

Having heard Jethmalani and granted a stay, the judges were about to rise when advocate R.S. Sodhi jumped up and sought to be heard above the buzz of an emptying court room. After hearing his oral submission, the judges stayed Satwant's execution as well. Lawyers welcomed the decision as courageous.

However, Jethmalani was not satisfied simply with winning a little time. In a three-and-a-half-hour submission, he forcefully argued for a re-interpretation of Article 72 of the Constitution. The article concerns the "power of the President to grant pardons, etc., and to suspend, remit or commute sentences" including the death penalty.

Jethmalani opened the arguments on December 7. He agreed that the power to pardon does not vest personally with the President, who is bound by the advice of the council of ministers. There was an impression during his initial arguments in the high court that he was arguing on the premise that the President could grant pardon in his individual capacity. But, Jethmalani assured the court, that was not his contention at all. The responsibility was entirely the Government's; his complaint was that the President had been wrongly advised.

He held that whoever took the actual decision—"the Cabinet or the law minister or whoever looks into applications for pardons"—it could not be an arbitrary exercise of power. He objected to the term "mercy petition", saying that "pardon is no longer an act of grace. It is a part of the constitutional scheme". In the US, he said, the courts have maintained for the past 80 years that pardon is "not a private act of grace from an individual happening to have this power".

Jethmalani further argued that since pardon was "a power combined with a duty" under a republican constitution, there must be certain guidelines—"and secret guidelines are no guidelines" since they might be whimsically changed at any time. He demanded not only that guidelines be imposed on the Government but that the exercise of the pardon power be open to judicial review like any other executive power. "Exercise of the power is judicially reviewable. So is its non-exercise," he said, referring to the President's refusal to hear him.

Jethmalani held that "a pardon reaches both the punishment for an offence and the guilt of the offender". In other words, a pardoned man was not simply excused the punishment, he was to be considered exonerated of guilt. To buttress this argument, he pointed out that the Indian Constitution, unlike that of the US and some other countries, lists suspension, remission and commutation of sentence separately. Therefore, he held, the separate provision for 'pardon' must be taken to mean innocence.

Standing in Jethmalani's stead the next day, former law minister Shanti Bhushan went even further, arguing against the very institution of the death sentence, which he called "barbaric and antiquated".

With characteristic erudition, Attorney-General K. Para-

Calendar of Events

1984

Oct 31: Prime Minister Indira Gandhi shot dead

Nov 15: Satwant arrested on discharge from hospital

Nov 30: Kehar Singh arrested

Dec 3: Balbir Singh arrested

1985

Feb 11: Charge-sheet filed

May 13: Hearings begin amid tight security in Additional Sessions Judge Mahesh Chandra's court

1986

Jan 22: All three held guilty and sentenced to death

Feb 19: All three appeal in Delhi High Court

Dec 3: High Court upholds verdict

1987

Feb 11: Balbir and Kehar appeal in the Supreme Court. Satwant follows on Feb 14

1988

Jan 12: Hearings begin, Jethmalani appearing for Balbir and Kehar, R.S. Sodhi for Satwant and Additional Solicitor General G. Ramaswamy for the state

Aug 3: Supreme Court upholds the death sentence on Satwant and Kehar while acquitting Balbir

Aug 30: Sodhi files a review petition for Kehar

Sept 5: Satwant seeks review alleging that the Supreme Court had given undue importance to the fact that the victim was the prime minister

Sept 7: Both petitions dismissed

Sept 23: Kehar files another review petition

Oct 10: Metropolitan magistrate asks police to investigate Satwant's complaint against ITBP men who shot him and Beant

Oct 11: Supreme Court dismisses Kehar's plea

Oct 12: Death warrants first issued

Oct 15: Kehar's son Rajinder Singh seeks pardon for him from the President

Oct 18: Supreme Court stays hanging till November 1 on lawyer Altameish Rein's petition

Nov 1: Supreme Court extends stay till November 7

Nov 3: President refuses pardon, Jethmalani petitions afresh

Nov 16: Supreme Court dismisses Rein's petition

Nov 21: Magistrate rejects Satwant's complaint against ITBP men

Nov 24: President rejects Jethmalani's second plea for pardon

Nov 30: Execution fixed for December 2

Dec 1: Stay by Supreme Court on separate pleas

Dec 9: High Court rejects Satwant's plea against ITBP men.

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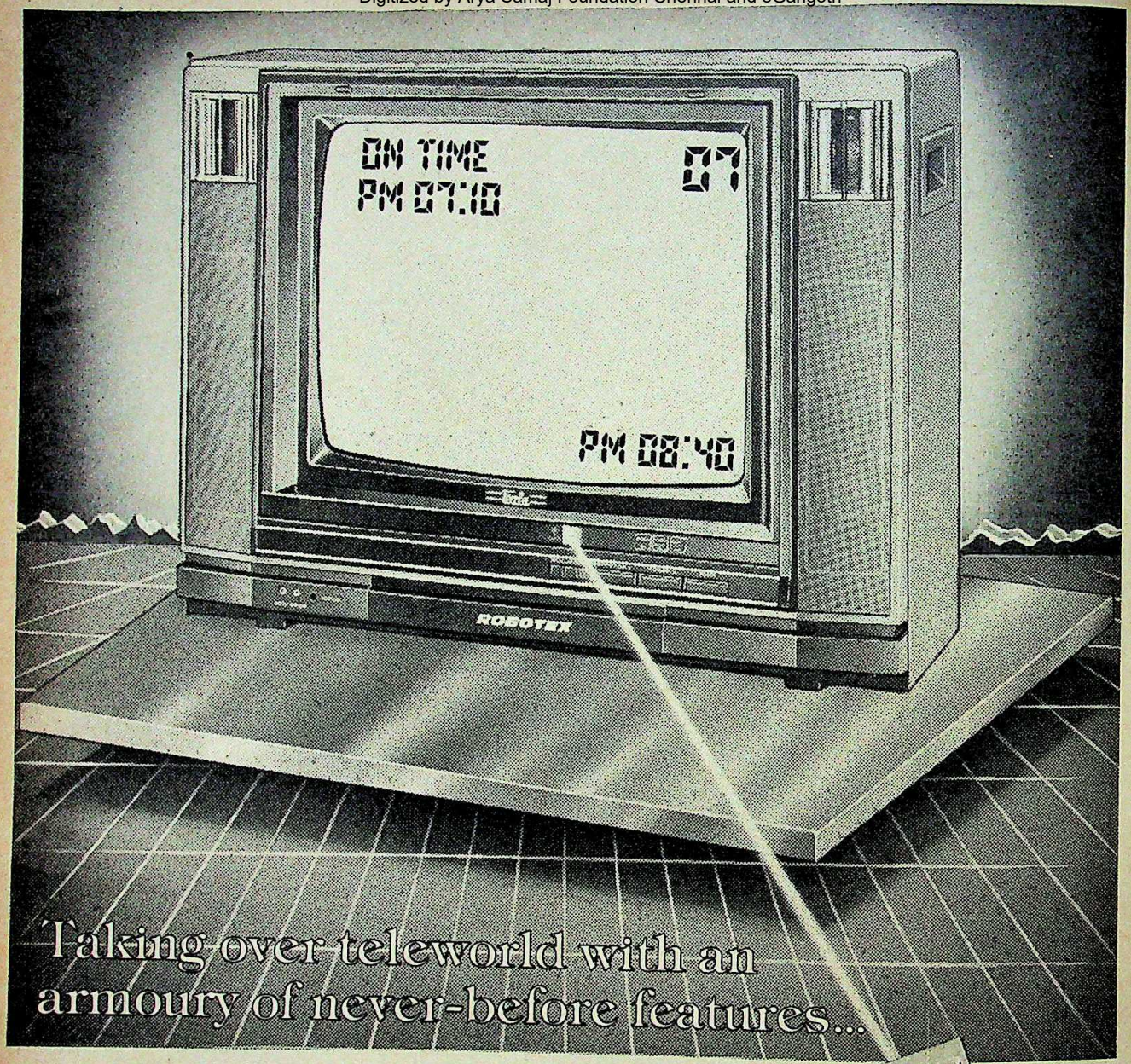

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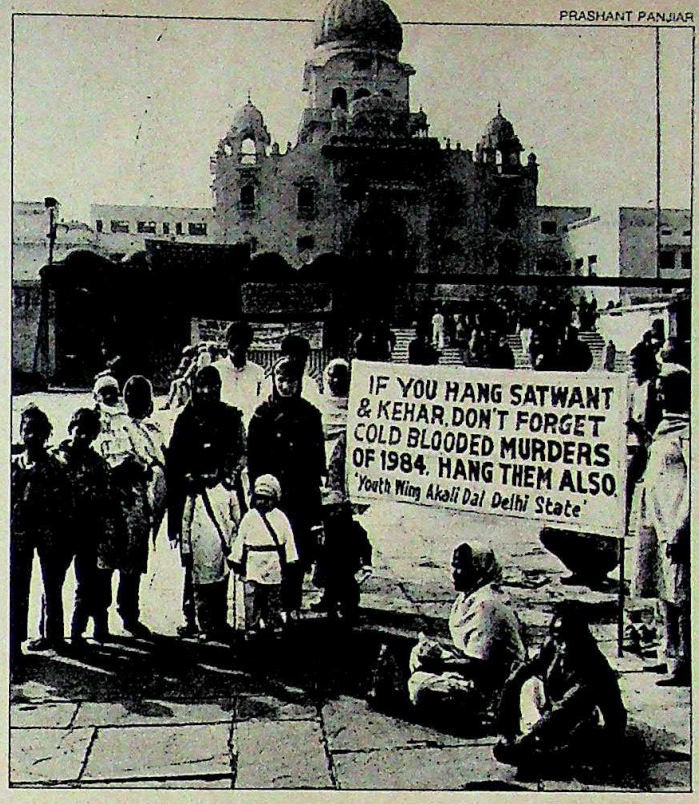
saran answered that the debate about capital punishment was endless. He noted that the Indian Penal Code gave a judge the alternative of sentencing a person to life imprisonment. Indeed, according to a Supreme Court ruling in 1973, judges must reserve the death penalty for "the rarest of rare cases". Parasaran argued in favour of keeping this judicial option open.

He held that pardon could not be considered a right. "Mercy begins where the judicial process ends," he said, adding that the question of mercy or pardon only comes up "when the right to life has been forfeited" under the law. While a republican executive certainly had a "public duty", it was not a duty to the individual convict. While agreeing with the court that Article 72 gave the President "the widest jurisdiction of the largest amplitude", he held that a fresh hearing would mean "an appeal over your lordships' judgement". Also, he argued, if a hearing were granted, it would necessarily be one-sided. ("Whom does he hear on the other side?")

Answering the contention that a pardon also addresses guilt, Parasaran said that pardon "abridges the enforcement of punishment but does not alter the judgement qua judgement". Chief Justice R.S. Pathak observed that the court's judgement continues to stand as judicial record even after a pardon is granted.

As to judicial review of executive pardon, the attorney-general pointed out that Article 74 provides that advice tendered by a council of ministers could not be enquired into in any court. He added that sovereign authority was divided among the three wings of the state, each of which drew its authority from the people.

Indeed, he felt that Articles 72 and 161 (which give governors the power to grant pardon) were "the only sovereign powers in the Constitution" in the sense that these powers were unfettered. He had earlier expanded on "the scheme of the Constitution", noting that all other provisions for executive action provide a standard such as "the President shall satisfy himself". No such proviso is attached to Article 72.



1984 riot victims protest in Delhi

Having dealt with the basic constitutional questions that had been raised in the historic hearing, the attorney-general explained the point that had sparked it all off—the statement of the President's office that "he cannot go into the merits of a case decided by the highest court". Parasaran held that this was specifically in response to Jethmalani's letter of November 3, asking for a hearing. In refusing to go into the merits of the case, the President had said nothing about jurisdiction, he held.

As the marathon hearings of both Kehar's and Satwant's petitions continued through the fortnight, mystery shrouded the future. As yet another holding-out stratagem Jethmalani informed the court that he intended to demand a reopening of the entire investigation into the assassination in the light of the recent arrest of Attinder Pal Singh in Punjab. Alleged to be one of the masterminds of terrorism over the past six years, Attinder is suspected by the authorities of having had a hand in the assassination conspiracy.

The Government's gameplan has been to avoid charge-sheeting any of the others it suspects of being a part of the conspiracy until the initial accused were convicted and the sentence executed. Among those the Government suspects are Attinder and former deputy inspector general of police Simranjit Singh Mann. But it has not charged them of the crime to avoid the possibility of the first convicts demanding a stay on their executions pending a fresh joint trial. The investigators only gave their 'final report' last month when Satwant demanded an investigation of Beant's killing by the ITBP men.

Jethmalani can still move a petition arguing that the trial of Satwant, Kehar and Balbir (another sub-inspector who was accused with them but acquitted by the Supreme Court) was vitiated and that justice was not done—something Jethmalani has said in various forums, including courts.

Advocate Altameish Rein had moved just such a petition in October to obtain the first stay. "I am positive I could have had the trial reopened," he asserted last fortnight, though the court more than once dismissed his petitions on discovering that he had no instructions from those whom he sought to represent.

If the court accepts Jethmalani's argument that a pardon petition is not a plea for mercy but an assertion of innocence, it is likely that Satwant will appeal to the President. He has hitherto steadfastly refused to seek 'mercy'.

Public opinion about the advisability of the hanging was divided. While most felt that the convicted assassins of the prime minister of the country must get the most stringent punishment in the statutes, Jethmalani was not alone in noting that "this execution will only confirm martyrdom on them".

And referring to Punjab, he added, "the emotional fissures will deepen", especially since the perpetrators of the riots that followed the assassination have not been brought to book. Whether or not using a reprieve as a political salve would be cost-effective, of course, remained a political question that could only be decided at the highest level.

—DAVID DEVADAS

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The leaders of over 40 per cent of humanity make an odd couple in terms of age and experience but share common concerns.

Deng Xiaoping (left); and Rajiv Gandhi

SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

Breaking the Ice

After three decades of Himalayan chill, the top leaders of India and China are finally resuming direct contact with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China. Much has changed since the last such encounter between the two leaderships, when Zhou Enlai's visit to India in 1960 ended disastrously and drove the two Asian giants to war. Now there are significant pointers to peace. An in-depth analysis:

"Chou always had a clearer idea than Nehru where power and interest lay, and by now they had become paired antagonists locked together."
—Sarvapalli Gopal, Nehru's biographer, describing the Nehru-Chou meeting in New Delhi in April 1960.

TWENTY-SIX years after the two Asian giants locked horns on the Himalayan crest where their continental plates ram together, they are finally going to sup together again, free of some of the old antagonism. It has been even longer since the last top-level contact between the two nations, when an indignant Zhou-en-Lai hotfooted to Delhi to run into a slighted Jawaharlal Nehru. It has also been more than a decade since the Janata Party external affairs minister Atal Behari Vajpayee made an equally disastrous visit to Beijing: the Chinese invaded Vietnam, a close friend of India and the Soviet Union, forcing him to leave early in embarrassment.

Then, for almost no reason, last year the two nations had been close to going to war again. And as long as thousands of freezing, shivering and tense troops stood muzzle-to-muzzle at the cruel Himalayan heights, skirmishes could always result from an accidentally pressed trigger. The last thing the two ambitious, developing and poor neighbours need now is hostility. On the other hand, both have so much to gain from peace in terms of trade, exchange of expertise and, particularly for India, the cooling off of a vulnerable front-

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ier tying down 10 mountain divisions.

Lately, the Chinese had been hinting that they would welcome a visit by the Indian prime minister if the border dispute was delinked from other bilateral issues. The invitation to Rajiv Gandhi was repeated in November 1987 by the Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister, Li Shuqing who headed the negotiating team for the eighth round of border talks. It was a difficult decision for India, which resents the continued Chinese occupation of more than 12,000 sq km of its territory *(see map)*. India claims all of Aksai Chin in the west that is under Chinese occupation. But the Chinese debunk the McMahon Line dividing Tibet and India in the east, besides claiming small chunks in the central sector. It was, thus, after a long period of deliberation that Rajiv said yes.

"In international diplomacy there is no such thing as perfect timing," admitted a senior MEA official. The defensiveness is in response to criticism in some circles that Rajiv is going two years too late and, burdened by domestic troubles, would fail to hold his own. "He should have gone shortly after coming to power, as he had been advised, rather than now when the next elections are round the corner. Now the Chinese are bound to seek concessions rather than accommodation," says former foreign secretary A.P. Venkateswaran who has had a distinguished innings as the ambassador in Beijing. Critics feel that Rajiv's visit is guided by both political expediency and Soviet pressure.

Sceptics also argue that at this moment, Deng Xiaoping, 85, too is burdened with internal problems and cannot be generous. Lesser cynics, however, admit that in the given circumstances peacemaking still has its best chance while Deng is in control. That is also supposed to be the reason why Gorbachev is in such a rush to visit China. Besides, even though China is facing revivalistic pressures from diehard Marxists, who oppose liberalisation, its foreign policy has been fairly consistent. Says Giri Deshingkar, director of the Delhi-based Centre for Study of Developing Societies and one of India's best informed Sinologists: "Deng is a survivor from the old Mao generation that saw so many turning points in history, from the great leap forward to the cultural revolution and the opening up. He is a patient man with a view of the world. It is best to talk when he is around."

What makes the contact even better timed is the rapid, positive change on the international scene. Gorbachev is pushing his reforms strongly in the Soviet Union and the US has a new President.

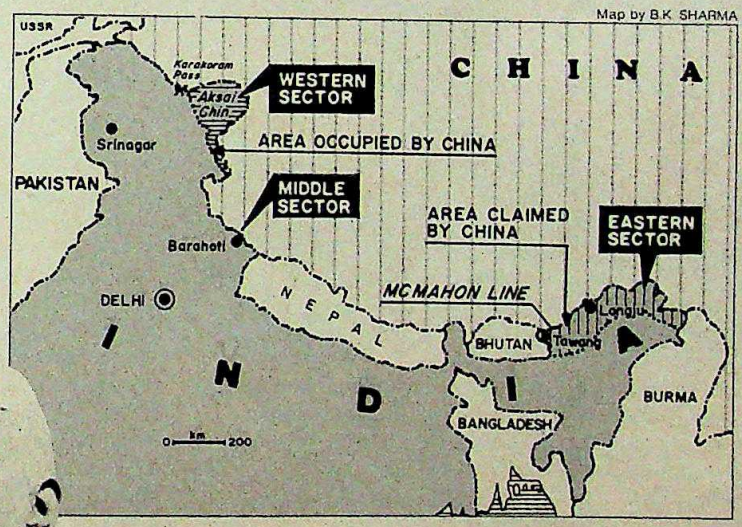
In Asia, Vietnam, which was one of the hurdles in Sino-Indian and Sino-Soviet relations, is rapidly ceasing to be a factor. The Soviets had been extended base facilities in Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay and Hanoi had followed almost racist policies driving out the ethnic Chinese who became the miserable boat people. India too has been one of Hanoi's closest friends and one of the first major non-aligned powers to recognise the Hanoi-installed Heng Samrin regime in Phnom Penh. Now Vietnam is disengaging from Kampuchea and is trying to appease the Chinese. The Vietnamese have even deleted anti-Chinese references from the preamble to their Constitution. In fact, diplomatic circles in New Delhi are abuzz with talk that the Vietnamese have actually requested Rajiv to convey a conciliatory message on their behalf to Beijing. China itself is opening up to South Korea. Closer home, there is change in Afghanistan and democracy in Pakistan.

There are other factors that make the timing of the prime ministerial visit rather propitious. Such a move would have been impossible in the bitter '60s. Then, the nation was collectively smarting under the humiliation of 1962. The Bangladesh war in 1971 helped to soothe that particular laceration in the national psyche. But there were Soviet sensitivities and the Chinese relationship with Pakistan, enmity with Vietnam and subversion in Afghanistan. On each one of these issues India was forced to stick to pre-committed positions.

Now, rather than turn jittery every time Chinese and Indian diplomats exchanged smiles, the Soviets are advising New Delhi to make up with Beijing. "In the '60s the Soviets were forced to make a choice between 'brothers' (India and China)," says analyst Bhabani Sengupta of the Centre for Policy Research. "Today, the Soviet message is clear: for God's sake don't force us to make that choice again."

For more than a decade India has found no evidence of a Chinese hand in insurgencies they had earlier backed in India's North-east in the '60s. And the Chinese should draw comfort from the

India still resents the continuing Chinese occupation of more than 12,000 sq. km of its territory.



Zhou Enlai, Nehru in "bhai-bhai" days

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conciliatory statements recently made by the Dalai Lama, whose continuous use of India as a political base has been a perennial sore point with Beijing.

There are other favourable factors. On his return, Rajiv may still face allegations of a sell-out by the Bharatiya Janata Party diehards. Yet, the generation of politicians and diplomats which either harboured the bitterness of the Chinese "betrayal" or participated in shaping the disastrous China policy, and was then committed to defend it forever is now extinct. Within the Congress too there is no one of consequence of the 1962 vintage.

AGAIN, the people most sullen with China were the officers of the Indian Army. Their pride had been so rudely shattered by the People's Liberation Army that had outnumbered, outgunned and outmanoeuvred them in that hopeless autumn of 1962. Now that generation is no longer running the army. Today's generals were captains in 1962, were not exposed to ridicule and are thus less inclined towards pure military revenge. Similarly, public opinion has moved a great deal from revenge to reconciliation. This was evident in the course of the dangerous stand-off in the eastern Himalayas in 1987 when opinion seemed sharply in favour of de-escalation. Says a member of the western diplomatic corps: "A whole new generation was born after 1962. Most of them may not be Sinophiles but they do not think of the Chinese as some multi-headed monsters out to gobble the Himalayas. Also, this is a more self-confident generation of Indians."

Lately, as diplomatic missives and emissaries have shuttled between New Delhi and Beijing, the question uppermost in everyone's mind is how to make the visit look successful without giving the impression that the border issue has been overlooked. Much attention has thus been focused on the exact language to be used on this aspect in the joint communique. As they did in their border negotiations with Bhutan, the Chinese want to say that the issue will be solved in a spirit of "mutual understanding and mutual accommodation". But India is wary of using the word "accommodation" as it could imply concessions.

This has led to much semantic hair-splitting and some experts like Deshingkar say it is because the expression means different things in different languages. "The Chinese expression for this, *Hu Liang Hu Rang* means mutual empathising, being forgiving to each other. It is like saying *'pehley aap, pehley aap'* in Lakhnavi etiquette, " he says. Whichever expression finally gets the nod the border question is being skirted. The approach can be based on Deng's logic when China and Japan signed their peace treaty ending what was technically a four-decade state of war by putting into cold storage the dispute over the Senkaku islands in the South China Sea. "Perhaps our generation is not wise enough to solve this problem," Deng said, "let us leave this to a generation with greater wisdom."

But there are other questions of significant symbolic value that even leaders of this generation need not duck. These refer to exchange of flights by the two national carriers, border trade, technology transfer and reopening of consulates. While China is believed to require help in modernising hundreds of medium technology factories built by the Soviets in the '50s, India has plenty to learn from China in the field of agricultural extension. The question of reopening consulates is, however, complicated by the Chinese insistence on Calcutta instead of Bombay.

While such relatively mundane issues are sorted out, when Deng and Rajiv are left alone, the leaders of more than 40 per cent of all humanity also have much more to talk about. They make an odd couple in terms of age, experience and motivations. But both also share a common vital concern, of leaving a lasting legacy for their peoples which have had so much in common since Indian missionaries built China's first Buddhist monastery in 65 A.D.

INDIA/CHINA

Contrasting Courses

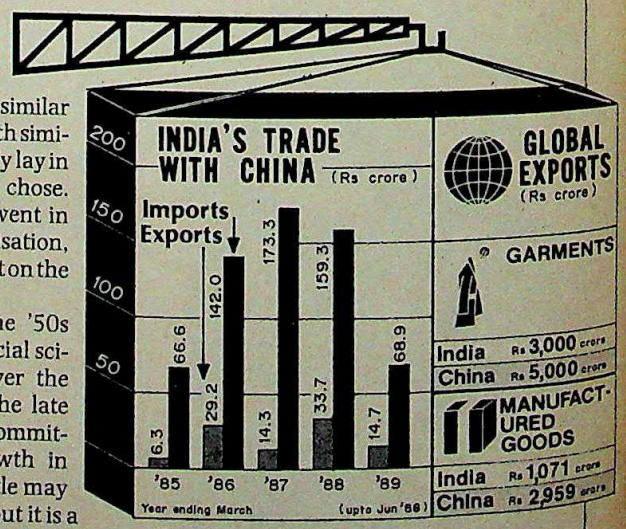
Rivals take different paths with varying results

As they followed separate courses to freedom, so have India and China gone by different vehicles in search of economic growth and national power. Each has had to carry the baggage of an old civilisation...but both have inherent advantages for growth.
—Jay Taylor in *The Dragon and the Wild Goose*, a comparison of India and China

NO two nations could be so different and yet so alike and also such natural rivals. With thousands of years of common history and two of the world's most ancient civilisations behind them, India and China stepped in the modern times together in the '50s, facing more or less similar problems, having similar assets and liabilities and with similar goals. The difference only lay in the paths the two nations chose. While China under Mao went in for communist collectivisation, Nehru's India was firmly set on the path of democracy.

The competition in the '50s fired the imagination of social scientists and leaders all over the world. On May 4, 1959 the late John F. Kennedy told the committee for international growth in Washington DC: "The battle may be more subtle than loud, but it is a very real battle nonetheless. For it is these two countries that have the greatest magnetic attraction to the uncommitted and the underdeveloped world... We want India to win this race."

Three decades later, at least on paper, India seems to have lagged far behind in that race. China, once the pariah state, is the darling of the western world, a nation that has turned the corner while its neighbour alternates between hope and despair. Nowhere is this difference more obviously evident than in the field of socio-economic devel-



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STEP BY STEADY STEP
BY STEADY STEP

See Deepak shine on a profitable past, a dynamic present and a glorious future.

C.K. Mehta, the vision and force behind the Deepak Group started manufacturing industrial chemicals in 1972. His company Deepak Nitrite soon won rapid acclaim for quality products. For shareholders it was a goldmine – an appreciation of over 150% every year.

A new era begins

In 1979, Deepak Nitrite promoted Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd. to convert Bombay High gas into profitable products.

DFPCL is the first and only private sector unit to own a gas pipeline.

The first to operate a merchant Ammonia plant consistently exceeding the national average for capacity utilisation.

The benefits flowed to all – consumers, shareholders & the exchequer.

Fast forward into the future

Now, Deepak is embarking on a Rs. 346 crores Forward-Integration-Programme that will propell the turnover to over Rs. 250 crores.

Setting up 5 integrated plants to manufacture chronically scarce Petrochemical, Industrial Chemicals & Fertiliser products.

Methanol. Nitric Acids. Prilled Ammonium Nitrate. Ammonium Nitrophosphate Fertiliser.

Yes, the foundations have long been laid. The products well known. The markets growing. The framework fast taking shape. The future spells great wealth. Mahadhan.

Yours... for generations to come.

Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd

- Petrochemicals
- Industrial Chemicals
- Fertilisers

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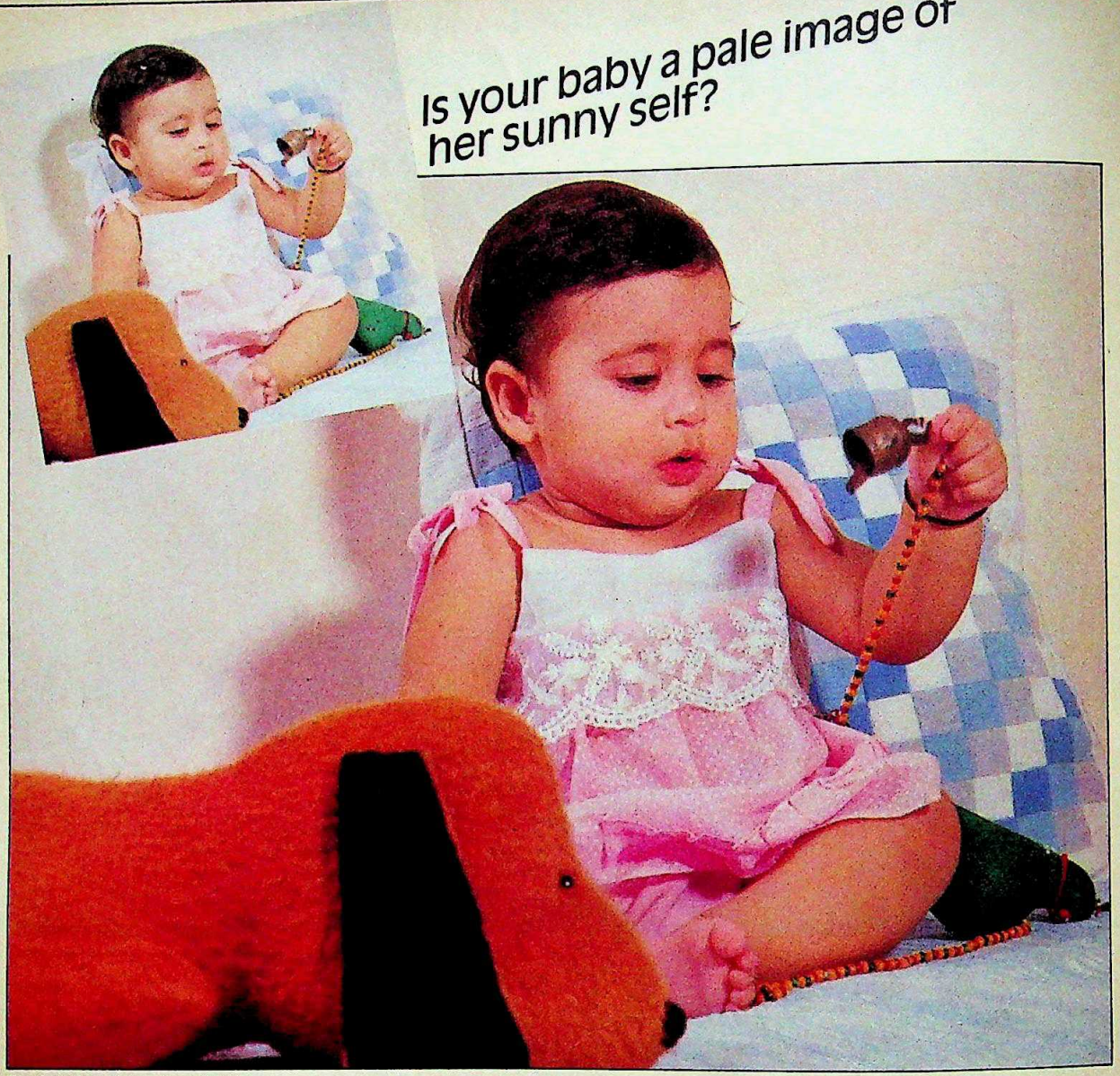
Is your baby a pale image of her sunny self?



The right distance for using a flash is four to eight feet.

Indu shows you how to take better photographs.

Taking a good photograph indoors is really easy if you remember these simple points.

To start with, if you're using a flash, make sure you keep the right distance from the subject. If you go too close, the light emerging from the flash will be too much in proportion to the distance. The result is a photograph that's pale. The features of the subject may look flatter too.

Standing too far doesn't help either ... you get a photograph that's dull, as the light is insufficient. The ideal range is between four feet and eight feet. Stay within this ..: and you can be sure of a photograph you're proud of.

Keeping these tips in sight helps. So does a good quality colour film. Like Indu. The colours are rich and lasting.

Hindustan Photo Films Mfg. Co. Ltd.
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Indunagar, Udhagamandalam 643 005
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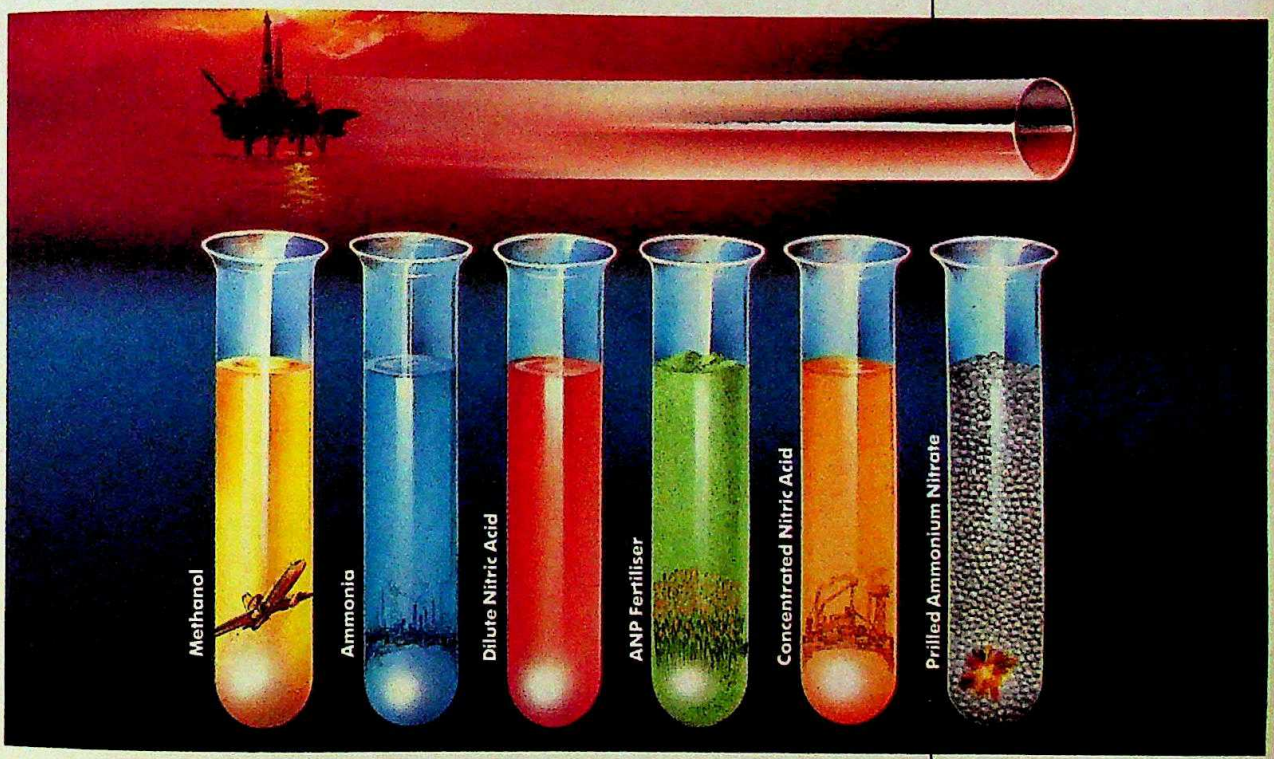
BRICK BY SOLID BRICK
BY SOLID BRICK...

See Deepak shine on a solid foundation and a dynamic future.



Consider the advantages DEEPAK enjoys because it made all the right moves.

By laying its own gas pipeline from ONGC, Uran to Taloja, it secured an uninterrupted source of raw material at cost-advantageous prices than others.

Locating its Ammonia plant close to its Fertiliser and Industrial consumers.

Managing the plant at a capacity consistently above the national average. Now to further capitalise on these advantages, DEEPAK is diversifying into three profitable industries – Petrochemicals, Industrial Chemicals and Fertilisers.

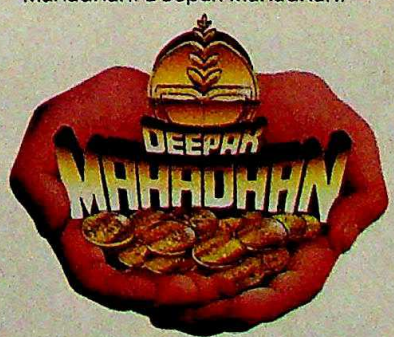
Rs 346 crores Forward Integration-Programme

From Gas, it will manufacture Methanol, a precious petrochemical. And by using its Ammonia production in-house, it will manufacture Nitric Acids, Prilled Ammonium Nitrate and ANP, a preferred fertiliser. All this in a closely integrated complex.

The most energy efficient plants

To ensure state-of-art-technology DEEPAK has contracted with world renowned process licensors: ICI, Davy Mckee, UK; Stamicarbon, Netherlands; Humphreys & Glasgow, UK; Weatherley U.S.A.; and Plinke, W. Germany.

Yes, the foundations have long been laid. The products well known. The markets growing. The framework fast taking shape. The future spells great wealth. Mahadhan. Deepak Mahadhan.



Yours... for generations to come.

Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd

- Petrochemicals
- Industrial Chemicals
- Fertilisers

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Introducing

THE CERA BATHSUITE

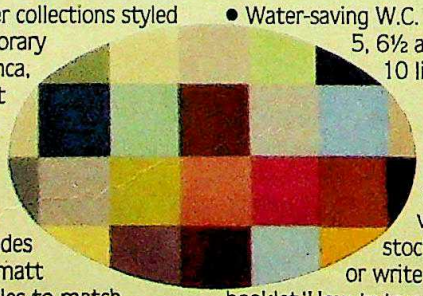
The Crowne Collection — Water saving W.C. cisterns available in 5 and 6½ litres.

Because the way you live today makes yesterday's bathroom outdated

The Cera BathSuite is a new experience, as exclusive and individual as you are. It allows you to express yourself in ways you never thought of before. And it lends itself to new ways of designing your bathspace — large or small.

Take a look at the features that will help you get the best from Cera.

- Four designer collections styled for contemporary living — Conca, Capri, Cornet and Crowne.
- The largest colour range — 30 stunning shades in glossy or matt finish with tiles to match.



- Water-saving W.C. cisterns — 5, 6½ and the usual 10 litres.

To see what the Cera BathSuite can mean to you, visit any of our stockists' showrooms, or write to us for our free booklet, 'How to transform yesterday's bathroom into a Cera BathSuite' — it's almost as good as being there.

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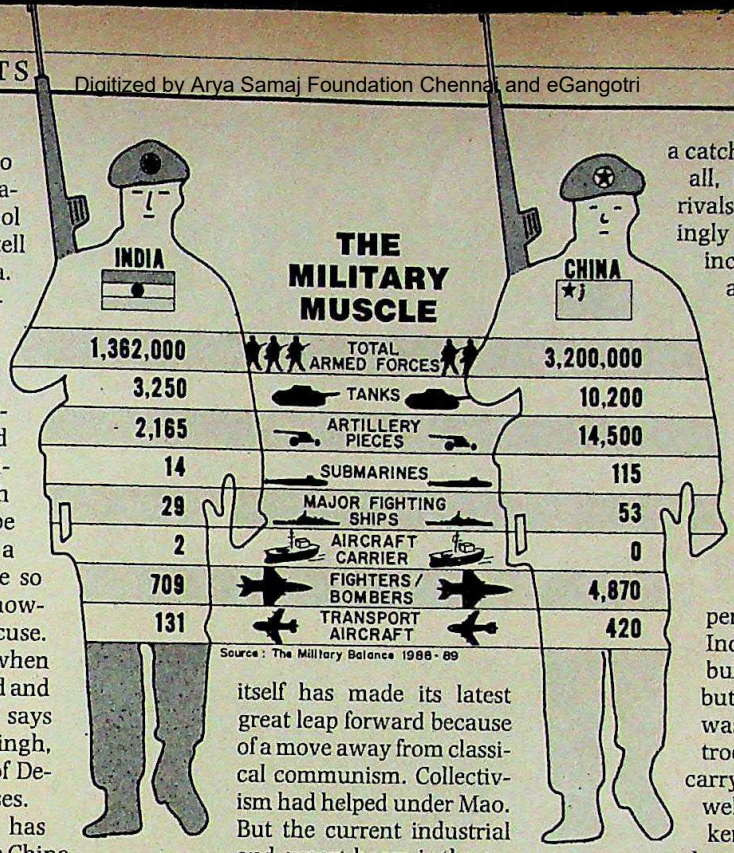
opment *(see chart)*.

From life expectancy to literacy, and from population control to the school dropout rate, statistics tell an unhappy tale for India. India is ahead only in national savings (24 per cent compared to China's 14) and the number of cars per 10,000 people (58 to China's 16). And though the current Chinese inflation rate is high (26 per cent) this could be because the base prices in a controlled economy were so low. Indian analysts, however, do not accept the excuse. "This is what happens when you come to the real world and deal in real economics," says Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, director of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses.

Unfortunately, India has also lagged in fields where China should have had natural disadvantages: tourism, foreign investment and exports. Similarly in technological development, India has failed to keep pace with its neighbour though it started with a major plus in scientific manpower. Henry Kissinger has always maintained that in terms of sheer scientific talent India far outpaces China. But the failure to bridge the gap between the lab and land has neutralised that advantage.

Yet it would be hasty to conclude that the Chinese lead signifies the superiority of Maoist communism over Nehruvian democracy. First of all, India too has grown at a fair pace without killing 30 million of its own people in the process or taking recourse to oppressive laws. Even more significant is the fact that China itself has made its latest great leap forward because of a move away from classical communism. Collectivism had helped under Mao. But the current industrial and export boom is the result of a return to market economy and free enterprise and the shedding of the xenophobic insularity. So clear is the deviation from the avowed ideological path that even Indian Marxists are now claiming that their communism is purer than Deng's. In a way that only vindicates what Nehru had told US President Dwight Eisenhower during their December 14, 1956 meeting: "In the long run, communism does, really, defeat itself."



THERE is thus no need for India to concede defeat ideologically. The Chinese, if anything, have been more pragmatic. They haven't let doctrine become a dogma and ideology an obstacle. That, backed by their nuclear muscle, has made them a true world power. As a matter of fact they are the world's third dominant nuclear power since France and UK are in any case appendages of the western bloc. India, on the other hand, is still struggling to consolidate her Third World leadership.

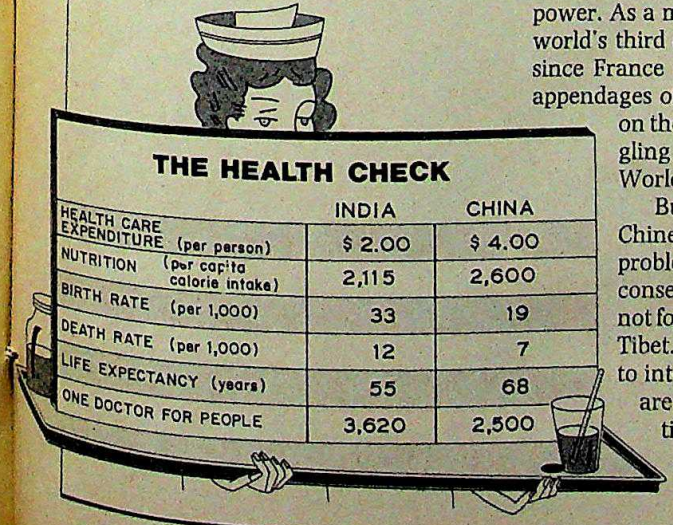
But it is not as if the Chinese do not have their own problems. They fear American conservatives who still have not forgiven them for annexing Tibet. They have not been able to integrate Taiwan. And they are also likely to have a hard time dealing with Hong Kong after 1997: "one country, two systems" is a catchy slogan. No more. Most of all, they fear their traditional rivals, the Japanese who, increasingly pressured by American disinclination to pay for defence, are spending more yen on their forces. And the last thing the Chinese would want is a hostile relationship with both India and Japan. "It may look like a distant possibility. But the Chinese have always looked at least 50 years ahead," says a western diplomat.

Compared with China, perhaps the only field in which India has moved faster is in building up its armed muscle but that is also because its base was so low. In 1962, Indian troops in light clothing and carrying ancient rifles faced well-equipped Chinese attackers in Arctic conditions. Today, the Himalayas are protected with heavily stockaded Indian positions. The Indians also have superiority in artillery and air support even though the Chinese Kalashnikov is still superior to the Indian Self Loading Rifle and, in case of a real showdown, the Chinese will still outnumber them.

Thanks to imports, India has technological edge. But the Chinese are rapidly bridging that gap. In case of a showdown, says Jasjit Singh, "we could hold them, but only for another five years." He says India's air superiority could soon be a thing of the past. "After all, the new Chinese F-8 armed with the American radar and medium range missiles is like the MiG-29. It may not measure up to the MiG-29 if it got close enough, but the whole superiority of the IAF lies in its ability to hit targets beyond the visual range."

The near-warlike buildup of 1987 has left Indian defence planners worried yet again about the forgotten frontier. With the new awareness, it is likely that steps will be taken to strengthen the defensive posture along the Himalayas. Says a general: "The Vietnam adventure told China how expensive it can be to confront a determined, well-armed defender." For the people of the two nations, however, it would be best if negotiations could deflect attention from confrontation to competition where it ultimately matters, back in the socio-economic arena.

—SHEKHAR GUPTA



THE HEALTH CHECK

	INDIA	CHINA
HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURE (per person)	$ 2.00	$ 4.00
NUTRITION (per capita calorie intake)	2,115	2,600
BIRTH RATE (per 1,000)	33	19
DEATH RATE (per 1,000)	12	7
LIFE EXPECTANCY (years)	55	68
ONE DOCTOR FOR PEOPLE	3,620	2,500

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GANG WARS

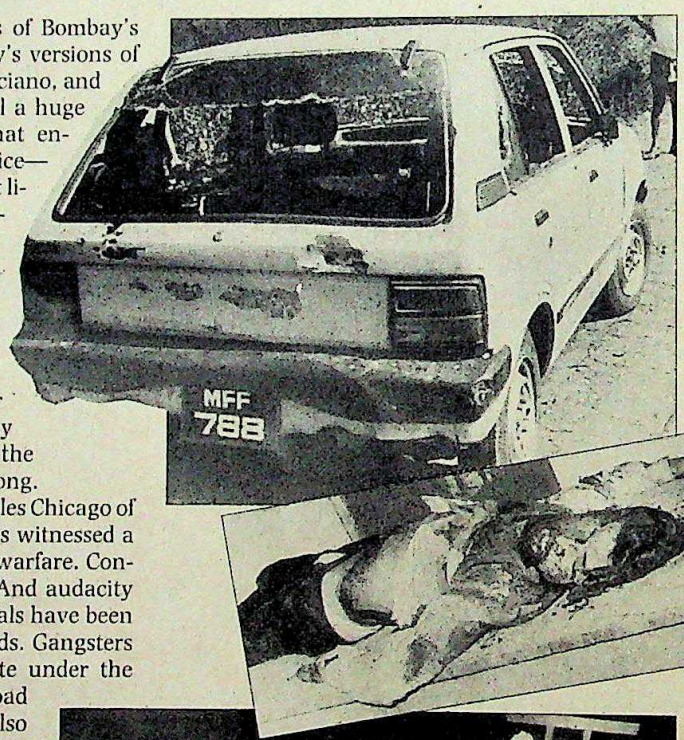
Battle for Supremacy

This year Bombay has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in gangland warfare. The old underworld order of Karim Lala, Vardarajan Mudaliar and Haji Mastan has given way to a new ruthlessness. Audacity has marked action: weapons have become sophisticated. And gangsters have discarded the cloak of darkness, brazenly carrying out shoot-outs in broad daylight. The city is passing through one of its bloodiest phases of underworld violence.

THEY are the sultans of Bombay's underworld. The city's versions of Al Capone, Lucky Luciano, and Little Caesar. They control a huge underground economy that encompasses every kind of vice—smuggling, narcotics, illicit liquor, extortion, land grabbing and prostitution. Wily and ruthless, they have for years eluded every effort of the Bombay Police to capture them. Now they are at war—among themselves. And, ironically, in their battle for supremacy, may willy-nilly achieve what the police has failed to for so long.

Bombay in 1988 resembles Chicago of 1930. This year the city has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in gang warfare. Contract killers have thrived. And audacity has marked the action. Rivals have been gunned down on busy roads. Gangsters have not sought to operate under the cover of darkness. The broad daylight shoot-outs have also seen the emergence of the sophisticated weapon. No longer the knife, no longer the country-made pistol. Now it is Berrettas, machine-guns, and lethal AK-47 assault rifles that form the arsenal. The getaway vehicle too is of the age—the sleek, swift Maruti.

The rules of the game have changed too. Bombay's underworld in the '70s was dominated by a handful of dons—Haji Mastan, Karim Lala, Yusuf Patel, Vardarajan Mudaliar and the like. Today they have been eclipsed by brash upstarts. While Mastan and Lala are said to be in semi-retirement, Patel has moved into construction, and Mudaliar died in Madras early this year of natural causes. The four represented the old order. In their time, territories were carefully carved out and intruders simply shooed away. Each of these ganglords wielded considerable influence among politicians and the police. Their legacy is fearsome—the keys to Bombay's underworld.



(From top) Bullet-sprayed Maruti; a battered gangster; and Hamid Aziz shot point-blank

At stake today is that legacy. Senior police officials reckon a polarisation of forces was inevitable "in this transition period". And sure enough new alliances and new chieftains have emerged. The one constant factor in this changing scenario is Dawood Ibrahim, the charismatic Dubai-based don, who operates a thriving bullion smuggling empire which officials estimate is worth Rs 150 crore. Dawood rules Bombay in absentia, through a battalion of lieutenants. Quite naturally, every now and then, yesterday's lieutenant becomes today's challenger.

The battle for Bombay's underworld crown has taken its toll. This year 13 criminals have died in shoot-outs. A sampler of the city's continuing gang war makes chilling reading:

► (Sunday, December 4, 1988: Ashok Joshi (believed to be the ganglord of east Bombay) and four associates are

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headed towards Pune in a Maruti car. At Kolkhe village near Khopoli at 5 a.m., say eye-witnesses, a Maruti van overtakes the car, and 180 rounds are fired into it by six men armed with machine-guns, killing Joshi, Shyamsundar Nair, Satish Sawant, Dilip Landage and Karunakar Hegde. Joshi was a known associate of the late Rama Naik, once a trusted lieutenant of Dawood.

► Monday, November 28, 11:30 a.m.: Gopaldas Rajwani alias Gopaldada, who, police say, is a notorious smuggler, steps out of the Bombay High Court after having secured bail in a murder case against him. Four persons fire at him from a Maruti car. Four bullets hit him and he is rushed to J.J. Hospital, where he is recovering. Rajwani says his assailants were Pappu Kalani, president, Ulhasnagar Municipal Council and his relatives. In an interview with INDIA TODAY Kalani denied the accusation.

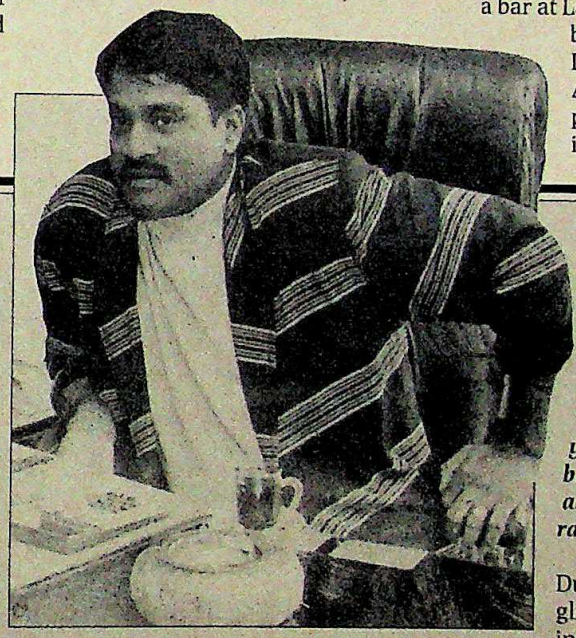
►Sunday, November 27: Arvind Dholakia, arrested seven times (under COFEPOSA and NSA),. owner of the sleazy Hotel Caesar's Palace in Bandra, receives two visitors at the entrance to his hotel. He leads one to his cabin, while the other waits in the lobby. Minutes later Dholakia is riddled with nine bullets. The two men escape in a Maruti. A year ago Dholakia had survived an attempt on his life. His younger brother, Mahesh, was gunned down in April 1987 (INDIA TODAY, April 30, 1987).

► Monday, November 21, 1988, 11 a.m.: Satish Laxman Raje is travelling in his air-conditioned Honda Accord car from his home in Parel village towards Byculla. A taxi tails him. At a traffic intersection two men break open the windows of the car with a hammer and fire eight rounds at Raje from a .32 revolver. They flee in a waiting taxi. Raje dies on the way to hospital. He was believed to be a close associate of Dawood. A week later another Dawood crony, Manu Prakash Karamchandani, is similarly gunned down.

► October 25, 1988: Chandrashekhar Mirashi, believed to be an associate of the late Rama Naik escapes a bid on his life. According to reports it was Mirashi who had made the unsuccessful bid on Arvind Dholakia early this year.

► October 8, 1988: The place, a railway crossing near Kanjur Marg, a suburb in east Bombay. Ashok Joshi and his associates are driving towards the police station. A Maruti van stops at the side of the car. There is a burst of gunfire. Joshi survives the incident—three others don't.

►July 20, 1988: Fun-n-Food restaurant, a bar at Lamington Road in central Bombay. At 7.25 p.m. Hameed Aziz Dilip is on his sixth peg of whisky. Across the table sit two men apparently known to him. Hameed is shot at almost point-blank



DAWOOD IBRAHIM

"My men are not involved"

IN a telephonic conversation with INDIA TODAY, *Dubai-based Dawood Ibrahim—who police believe is behind the recent underworld killings—defends himself:*

Q. *What do you have to say about the recent spate of gangland killings in Bombay?*

A. This is bad. I feel very sorry about the killings. Things are getting out of hand. Why these killings are taking place is up to the authorities to investigate. They are not a good sign.

Q. *Press reports allege you are involved in the killings.*

A. I feel both the press and the police have been misinformed. They are either getting the wrong information or it is motivated. I'm sitting in Dubai—I have nothing to do with the killings. The police and the press have found a convenient scapegoat. Several times I have sought the advice of my legal counsel to approach the courts for justice. I have been advised not to do so.

Q. *Are any of your men in Bombay involved in the killings?*

A. Frankly speaking I don't deal in these matters. And my men are definitely not involved. It is the Bombay Police, in fact, who have been harassing my family in Bombay. They arrest them whenever there is a killing. The arrests are publicised widely. After a few days the police release them as they have no proof. But unfortunately this does not receive wide publicity.

Q. *What was your relationship with the Dholakia brothers and Ashok Joshi?*

A. With Arvind and Lalit Dholakia I had a close relationship. But it was personal and had nothing to do with business. There was no enmity. The police have already arrested two people in connection with the killing of Arvind—these men used to work for Dholakia before. So the killing was probably due to rivalries within the group. I have nothing to do with Ashok Joshi—never met him. The police take the name of Dawood if they don't make progress in a case.

Q. *There are reports that you operate a Rs 1,200-crore bullion smuggling empire and are also involved in a range of criminal activities.*

A. Any Indian living in Dubai is linked to gold smuggling. But people here are also involved in legitimate business. As NRIs we contribute to the foreign exchange earnings of the country. At Dubai my companies do business in trading, garments, real estate and have shares in a hotel operation. I'm happy here, away from the hassles. Financially I'm comfortable—I don't have to indulge in nefarious activities.

Q. *What do you say about violence?*

A. It's not good for the people and society. But violence in Bombay appears to be increasing day by day. The authorities should put an end to it.

Q. *Would you like to return to India?*

A. I would definitely like to return. My roots are there. But I fear harassment from the authorities. I have always been victimised. This is the sum total of what I have to say.

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range. Several theories are making the rounds on the identity of the killers. Hameed is believed to have had a running feud with Karim Lala. According to police sources he was not on good terms with Dawood and even Naik. Naik and Hameed were apparently involved in a raid on Dawood's gold consignment.

The Bombay police are understandably concerned about the recent spate of killings. After the Joshi shoot-out Police Commissioner V.K. Saraf announced that the Maharashtra Government wanted to establish a "special cell" to tackle gang warfare. The cell would be headed by an inspector general. The Additional Commissioner (crime) Arvind Inamdar says the gang warfare involves only the second liners. "They are moving to consolidate their power base."

The rise of Dawood Ibrahim has been a crucial factor in this consolidation process. He stands alone today, his opposition decimated. When he started out in the early '80s, Karim Lala tried to stop him. And he paid the price. Three of Lala's men—Samad Khan, Amirzada, and Alamzeb—were killed between 1983 and 1986. At that stage fearing certain death he fled to Dubai. He left behind what he thought were his trusted men—Bhai Thakur, Sharad Shetty and Rama Naik.

The present round of gang wars started rather innocuously—over a piece of land. According to police sources Dawood summoned Naik and Shetty to a meeting at Dubai in May. At that meeting Naik staked a claim to a plot of prime land at Bombay's northern suburb of Jogeshwari. There was a heated argument between Naik and Shetty, who felt the land belonged to him. Dawood and Chhota Rajan, the former's aide-de-camp, supported Shetty. This led to a bigger argument on sharing profits. At that stage

PORBANDAR

Harbour of Violence

IT is the ultimate insult to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi. Just a little distance away from Kirti Mandir in Porbandar, where the messiah of non-violence was born, is a 1-sq km area that is so dangerous even the police think twice before pursuing criminals there.

Kharvawas, as the area is called, is home to the dreaded Kharva (fishermen) gangsters. Fifty thousand people live cramped in it. The crackle of gunfire is common as rival gangs battle each other for supremacy. The police believe that criminals in the area have about 150 semi-automatic weapons apart from different types of country-made illegal weapons.

Tracking the criminals is difficult as the area is a labyrinth of lanes and by-lanes. Vehicles find it difficult to move around swiftly and the gangsters escape by simply scaling the three-storey buildings which dot the area. Says Tirathraj, Porbandar's superintendent of police: "The topography of Kharvawas is what makes our task of chasing the criminals difficult."

Main junction of Porbandar; and (inset) Tirathraj: beleaguered

Suddenly last month Tirathraj and his beleaguered force found themselves in the midst of another bloody gang war which erupted after a two-year lull. The new phase of the inter-gang warfare was sparked off when two members of the notorious Iku Gagan gang were gunned down by the rival gang of former municipal president Naren Sudha. Retaliation was swift. Iku Gagan despatched his brother Jashu and others to avenge the killings. Within just 30 minutes of their fellow gang members having been killed, they shot down the killer, Lalji Kanji. Iku Gagan and one of his brothers, Ranchod, who is the president of the Porbandar Municipality, were immedi-

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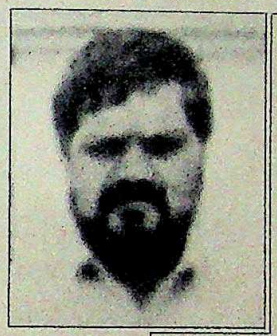
Naik parted ways with Dawood. He was counting on the support of Arun Gawli and Ashok Joshi. But Naik did not survive for long.

Naik had operated Dawood's franchise in east Bombay and was on the police list of absconders. He was wanted in as many as 13 cases. On July 21, sub-inspector Rajan Katdare of Nagpada police station received a tip-off that Naik would be in Chembur. Katdare reached the place with two unarmed constables. Naik stepped out of a Maruti car and went towards a haircutting saloon. There was an exchange of fire and Naik died on the spot. The police in an official statement said Naik was killed in an "encounter". The local press suspect it was a "fake encounter". Senior police officials dismiss the argument that Dawood was using his friends in the police to kill his rivals.

There is a sense of irony in the way Naik was killed. As Dawood's lieutenant he reportedly was his top contract killer. Contract killing or *supari* (named after the custom of exchanging *supari* after a deal is consummated) is a new phenomenon in Bombay's underworld. As the underworld war became messier the demand for contract killers increased. For a single "hit" the fees can range between Rs 25,000 and Rs 50,000. Contract killing is an off-shoot of the "parallel courts" established by gang-lords in their territories to dispense justice. If approached for help to evacuate stubborn tenants, or pressure creditors to pay up, the dons oblige.

The murder of Arvind Dholakia last fortnight and his brother Mahesh in April last year may have been the work of contract killers. The Bombay Police have already arrested two men, Deepak Jadhav and Ganapati Mangutkar, for the murder of Arvind. Arun Gawli, the late Rama Naik's assistant, was suspected of killing

Iku Gagan: mixing politics and crime



When two members of his gang were killed, Iku Gagan despatched his brother and others to avenge them. They succeeded in shooting down the killer—within 30 minutes.

ately arrested.

Two days later, a truck belonging to Iku Gagan was fired upon by Naren Sudha's gang. The truck driver escaped narrowly. In a reprisal, Gagan's associates shot at Sudha's man, Kala Karshan. They struck again on two members of the gang of smuggler Lalji Harji alias Kalio Bali, who has joined hands with Sudha.

Porbandar has a long history of gang warfare. The tentacles of the mafia spread far and wide. It control is not only the flourishing transport business but also the civic body. Nearly half the 40-odd municipal councillors have criminal charges, including murder, registered against them. While Ranchod Gagan is municipal president, two of his brothers, including Iku Gagan, are councillors. Naren Sudha, the leader of the rival gang, too is a councillor.

The influence of the gangs is so widespread that in 1984 the Government had to even close down Porbandar Jail when it became obvious that it had been transformed into a hostel for hardcore criminals who were let out at night to stalk the streets and return the next morning to spend the day comfortably behind bars as guests of the Government. The jail was recently reopened and with it began the recent, more bloody phase of the gang war.

Dominating the murky scenario are the Kharvas led by Iku Gagan and Naren Sudha in the city and the Mehrs, who claim to be Kshatriyas, in the rural areas. The aim of these gangs is to control the transport business and the port. They extort Rs 5 to Rs 10 per tonne of the bauxite, coal and oil that passes through the port.

Iku Gagan was formerly a member of Naren Sudha's gang. But after breaking away from Sudha he had managed to expand his empire taking advantage of the fact that his brother Ranchod is the civic chief. The recent string of killings and counter-killings is the result of the intense fight for supremacy between the two.

Though the Kharva gangs dominate Porbandar city, the Mehr gangs are considered more dangerous. Says a leader of the Mehr gang: "We believe in the dictum 'bullet for bullet'. Life is not worth living if you are not able to avenge the killing of your near and dear ones." How this dictum is practised was seen recently when a gang leader Sharman Munja was gunned down. His elder brother Arjan vowed to take revenge on the rival group of Mehrs led by Kala Keshav who had been arrested by the police. Arjan died of cancer with his vow unfulfilled and so his brother Bhura, who had settled down in London, left his family behind and came to Porbandar two years ago. He ventures out from the seclusion of his house in a convoy of three cars full of gun-toting guards. Says a police constable who knows Bhura: "He has only one mission in his life; to avenge the murder of his brother and till he accomplishes that he will not leave Porbandar."

It is the traders and businessmen of the area who are the most affected by this bloody and vicious cycle of murder and revenge. Says the owner of a guest-house: "Porbandar is an island of mafia dons and we are all slaves." At least five engineering units have closed down recently, unable to cope with the 'taxes' that the gangsters have levied on them. And many ships scheduled to anchor at the Porbandar port have turned sail for safer ports after hearing news of the gang war.

Strangely there are many people who feel that the gangsters do their share of good acts too. Said a working woman, Avantiben: "The gangsters are only bothered about money. Children and women feel safe here." Most of the gangsters have a strong, even touching, belief in God. Some of them even came under the influence of Pandurang Athavale, known for his discourses on the Bhagavad Gita. During the Navaratri festival Iku Gagan donated gold rings to 150 girls.

God is no doubt feared by the gangsters but it is the gun that they worship. As a shopkeeper of Porbandar put it: "Come what may, they won't leave the language of the gun."

—UDAY MAHURKAR in Porbandar

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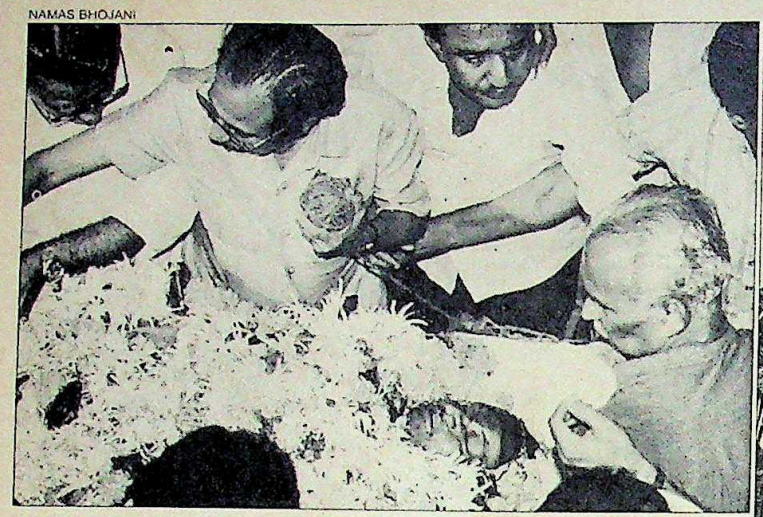
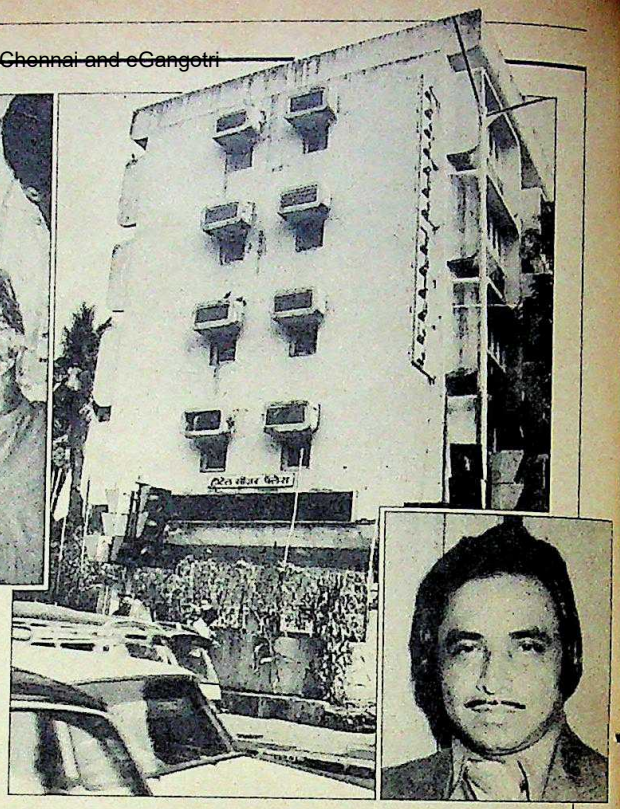




(From left) Arvind Dholakia funeral; Caesar's Palace hotel and Mahesh Dholakia: deadly games

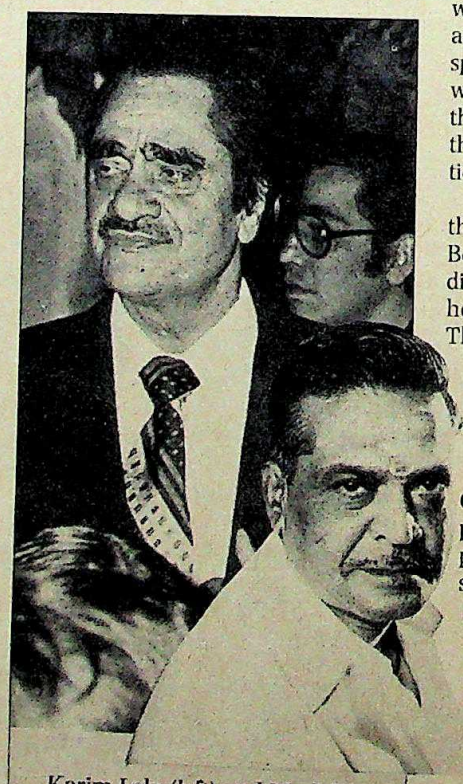
Mahesh Dholakia. There are many theories which absolve Jadhav, Mangutkar and Gawli. But as observers point out, half-baked theories form an integral part of crime watching.

THE Dholakia brothers were classy criminals. Hotel Caesar's Palace was the city's most visible vice den. Like Dawood and Naik, the Dholakias were well connected. The hotel's licence was revoked several times and each time restored a few weeks later. On September 24, Commissioner Saraf issued the most recent order. Three weeks later, on October 18 the Dholakias were back in business.

According to reports Dholakia had fallen out of favour with Dawood. At one time his name was linked with a raid on a police lock-up where assailants killed Babu Resham, an associate of Rama Naik. The killing of Naik, Dholakia and Joshi has definitely strengthened Dawood's position. His lieutenant in Bombay, Sadhu Shetty —who escaped an attempt on his life in early August—is now pitted against Arun Gawli who is left with a ragtag band of gangsters.

Gang-land alliances are temporary. And each time a new alliance is formed political equations change. Gangsters are no longer considered petty criminals. Instead as Inamdar puts it, "they are regarded as modern-day Robin Hoods". The rise of the Shiv Sena has further aggravated the situation. Khimbahadur Thapa, a Sena councillor who is in prison, has dubious connections in the underworld. Yet the Sena had no hesitation in giving him a seat. The Congress(I) too maintains links with the underworld. Underworld connections provide access to vote banks. Mudaliar controlled a substantial block of votes in the Matunga-Sion area. Dawood and Lala are influential in the predominantly Muslim areas of the city. And with elections approaching each party is wooing the gangsters.

The Bombay Police is placed in an unenviable position. "We are fighting with our hands tied," says one senior officer. The attacks on policemen—12 incidents have been reported so far—have escalated. The 750 sub-inspectors who are expected to tackle crime are not adequately armed and the commissioner spends most of his time attending to VIPs who keep flying in and out of Bombay. But the policemen themselves are not babes in the wood and many of them have connections with the underworld.



Karim Lala (left) and Mudaliar: the old order

Several reforms in the structure of the Bombay Police have been proposed. Bombay city under the reforms would be divided into three regions, each to be headed by an additional commissioner. Three joint commissioners at head office would then supervise crime, law and order, and administration. To head this super-structure a new post of chief commissioner would be created. But indications are that the state Government has not warmed to the proposal. Instead it is allowing the police force to rationalise its existing structure. To reduce administrative pressure, the number of police stations under an assistant commissioner and deputy commissioner for instance will be reduced.

As the Bombay Police and the state Government debate the merits of the various proposals, the gang wars show little sign of abating. The stakes are high. And Bombay will be the loser.

—S.N. VASUKI

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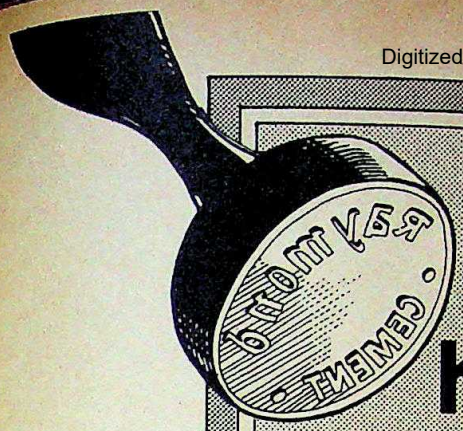

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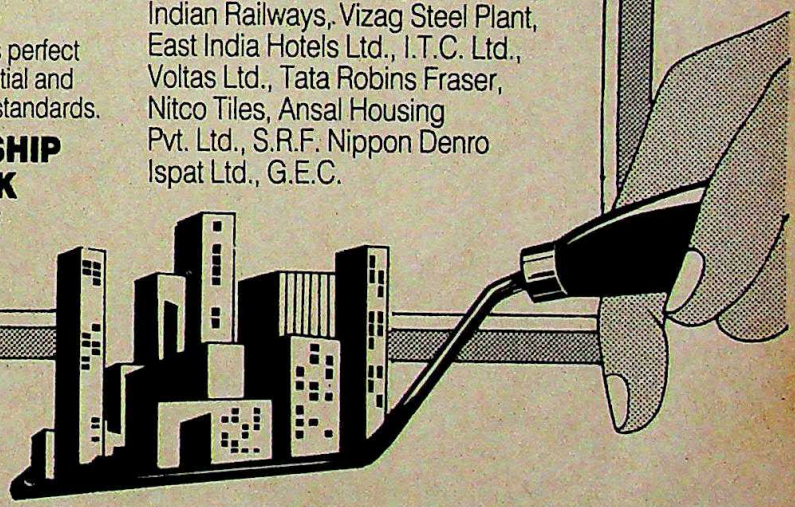

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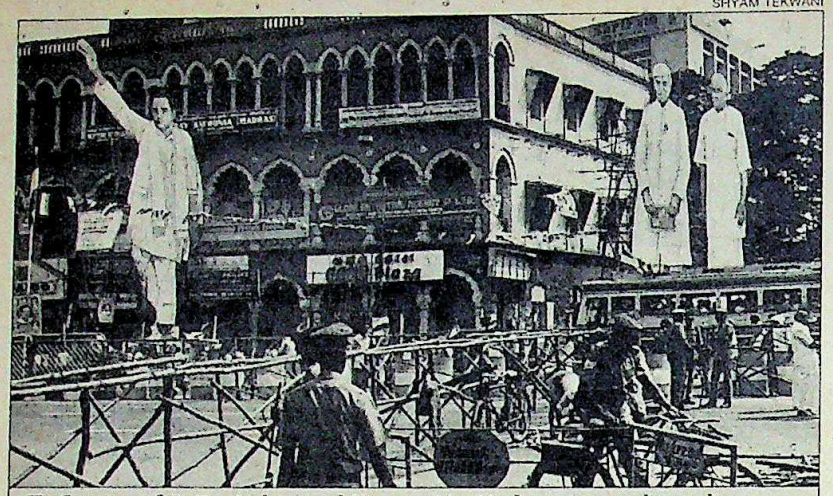

■ Cutouts of Rajiv, Nehru and Kamaraj in Madras: personality cult

TAMIL NADU

Preparing for Polls

New political alignments for a crucial election

IN Tamil Nadu, making electoral alliances is a far more formidable task than the tortuous process of matrimonial match-making. The Jayalalitha faction of the AIADMK and the Congress(I) realised this when after weeks of hectic talks their efforts at forging an alliance got bogged down on the question of chief ministership. Neither Tamil Nadu Congress(I) Committee (TNCC-I) chief G.K. Moopanar nor Jayalalitha, who believes that she is the rightful heir to MGR's political legacy, was willing to give up their claims to the throne.

But finally on December 11; the Congress(I) high-powered committee meeting in Madras decided to take a major gamble and go it alone after 15 years. In a sudden move, K. Karunakaran, Kerala's former chief minister and Congress Parliamentary Board member, announced: "Since we have been asked to recommend candidates for all the seats, it is clear that we will fight it out alone." The decision which marks a major shift was taken at the insistence of Moopanar who opposed the moves to take a piggyback ride to power. He argued that the Congress(I) was better placed than it was a few years ago and with the AIADMK badly fragmented, the territory was fertile.

Soon after the decision was taken many Congress(I) leaders who were worried about getting lost in Jayalalitha's shadow exuded a quiet confidence. Says Thangabalu, TNCC(I)'s general secretary: "We have decided to fight alone because the people of Tamil Nadu want Rajiv Gandhi's rule. They are fed up with the chauvinistic attitude of regional parties."

The Jayalalitha faction also heaved a sigh of relief, though a four-cornered contest can shatter its vote banks. Says S.D. Somasundaram, the faction's deputy general secretary: "We were never keen on an alliance because we don't need any crutches to walk. We are sure we can establish our majority."

The Congress(I)'s confidence stems from the changing caste equations in the state. The leadership feels the DMK has lost its base among the Muslims and the Vanniyars. This is because of a split in the Muslim League that was allied to the DMK and because the Vanniyars have launched an agitation against the reservations policy for jobs and admissions for backward classes favoured by the DMK. The AIADMK has also lost its pre-eminent position as a regional party because of a three-way split.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi seemed impressed with this argument and in one of his speeches during his barnstorming tours of the state he announced that Moopanar would be the chief minister. Nevertheless, senior lead-

JAYALALITHA

"We will get a majority"

FOR 38-year-old former film star Jayalalitha, it is a last ditch stand. A victory could catapult her to dizzying heights as one of the nation's youngest chief ministers. Ever self-confident, Jayalalitha believes in the power of her own charisma. And in a field littered with the has-beens and would-bes of Tamil filmdom, she stands head and shoulders above most of her opponents.

Apart from arch-foe M. Karunanidhi, she is still the only state leader who continues to be a crowd-puller. Yet, she is inaccessible except to her closest confidants. Her posh bungalow in Madras' fashionable Poes Garden locality is heavily guarded. Jayalalitha's living-room is crammed with pictures of her with MGR—as if to drive home the point that she is his only heir. Tamil Nadu's leading lady spoke to INDIA TODAY *about her gameplan for the forthcoming elections. Excerpts:*

Q. ***What do you feel about the Congress(I)'s decision to go it alone in the assembly polls?***

A. I am glad that I am relieved now. It is good that the Congress has finally come to a decision after dithering for many months.

Q. ***Why do you feel relieved? Were you under some kind of a pressure to have an alliance with the Congress(I)?***

A. Because we didn't want to be accused of deviating from MGR's policy of having cordial relations with the Centre. We are confident of our strength. I'm getting an overwhelming response from the 50 million people of Tamil Nadu. All this talk about the alliance is in the newspapers and the media.

Q. ***Is there a possibility of starting a fresh dialogue with the Janaki faction now?***

A. We've considered the feelers sent by the other faction. But we feel merger with the Janaki faction is neither feasible nor desirable. It is more an ideological fight than a clash of personalities. It's not a personal fight between Janaki and me.

Q. ***Did talks with the Congress(I) break down after you insisted on being chief minister?***

A. We can't be browbeaten into surrendering the leadership to anybody. I've never been intimidated by any one.

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No one from my party would agree to someone from any other party becoming the chief minister. Even the people of Tamil Nadu will not accept this. One of the preconditions for any kind of alliance is that the other party should agree to the AIADMK forming the Government. We've been reiterating that we will bring back MGR's rule. This can be done only if a person from our party becomes chief minister.

Q. *And it has to be only you.*

A. I have never insisted that only I should be the chief minister. It is for the party to choose any one.

Q. *But will you forge an alliance or form a coalition government with the Congress(I) after the elections?*

A. It is a hypothetical question. We'll get an absolute majority on our own.

> "Rajiv has made several visits at the state exchequer's expense. Over Rs 60 crore of public money has gone down the drain on his visits—which have served no purpose."

Q. *What are the issues at stake in these elections? What are you offering to the people which is new and original?*

A. We will provide a corruption-free government. Our party has been identified as the party of the have-nots. They trust us and we have to work for the economic uplift of these people. We'll continue the noon-meal scheme. We will set up old age homes and try to reduce unemployment. We will also appoint a committee to look into district-wise industrialisation and remove imbalances.

Q. *But the AIADMK was in power for over a decade. Does this mean that it couldn't do much for the people?*

A. The Government did its best during MGR's rule, but because of stepmotherly treatment from the Centre, many important projects were held over. Given the nature of Centre-state relations, the state is heavily dependent on the Centre. I would lay the major responsibility for any slippage with the Centre.

Q. *But MGR had a good relationship with the Centre. Why couldn't he get more financial support?*

A. It has always been the Centre's strategy to erode the base of a regional leader. The Centre always tries to create an impression that a regional leader can be a success only if it supports him.

Q. *How would you tackle this problem?*

A. We'll fight for the state's rights. We'll arouse a national attitude in our favour.

Q. *Are you in touch with the other opposition leaders?*

A. Not yet.

Q. *How will you fulfil your promises? How will you get the money?*

A. If we succeed in removing corruption, we'll be able to finance many new projects. Presently, 90 out of 100 rupees disappear due to corruption.

Q. *But corruption grew under MGR.*

A. Until 1984 the MGR government was free of corruption. It was only after his return from America in 1985, that corruption grew under the coterie led by Janaki and Veerappan. And the corrupt have joined the Janaki faction.

Q. *What do you have to say to the prime minister's statement that the state suffered badly under the Dravidian parties' corrupt rule?*

A. These are most unfortunate statements and reflect badly on his party's past alliance with these regional leaders.

Q. *Do you think that Rajiv's visits to the state will get him more votes?*

A. The answer will be provided during the elections only. And if I voice my opinion on the prime minister's visits, I will be accused of a bias.

Q. *But what do you think is the strategy behind his visits to the state?*

A. He is anxious to see that his party comes to power. He has made several visits at the state exchequer's expense. Over Rs 60 crore of public money has gone down the drain on Rajiv's visits—which have served no purpose.

Q. *But President's rule has created a good impression. Do you agree?*

A. President's rule was imposed to promote the Congress(I)'s interests in the state. It has not solved any major problem. I personally respect Dr Alexander who is honest and a good administrator.

Q. *What is your stand on the role of the IPKF in Sri Lanka?*

A. I think it is one big mess which the Indian Government has got into. They should not have gone there in this way.

Q. *Will you demand the IPKF's withdrawal?*

A. It is a difficult question. Having once stepped in, it is difficult to withdraw. But when the elections are over in Sri Lanka, they may find it difficult to remain there.

Q. *Who is your enemy number one in the state?*

A. The DMK. It is going to be a fight between me and Karunanidhi.

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ers like External Affairs Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Home Minister Buta Singh—both members of the high-powered committee on Tamil Nadu elections—favoured till the very end an alliance on the premise that it would ensure a definite victory and boost Congress(I) morale in preparations for the parliamentary elections.

The Jayalalitha faction had explored several other options. K.K.S.S. Ramachandran, who was a powerful minister in MGR's cabinet and now a leader of the faction, was in touch with S.Muthuswami of the Janaki faction on the possibilities of an alliance. The two met but the Jayalalitha faction continued to emphasise that it would not compromise on the question of chief ministership. With these new developments, it is possible that both factions may begin a fresh dialogue.

Meanwhile all parties have begun the process of selecting candidates. Leaders of the Congress(I) fanned out to different parts of the state to interview aspirants. The prime minister has directed the state Congress(I) to finalise the list of candidates before he leaves for China. Now that the party is fighting the battle alone more attention will be given to the selection of candidates and efforts might be made to rope in well-known outsiders. The prime minister, however, has made it clear that he would give more weightage to Moopanar's recommendations.

With over 10,000 prospective candidates from all parties descending on Madras last fortnight, it turned into Ticket Mela city. The DMK, with over 5,000 applications, had the biggest list. And in the ticket-seeking game, Jayalalitha turned out to be a tough customer: She demanded that all shortlisted applicants deposit Rs 1 lakh.

If the Congress(I) sticks to its decision of going it alone, the DMK could well turn out to be the major beneficiary. With about 28 per cent committed voters, the DMK perhaps has one of the largest vote banks. And with the countdown to the state elections having started, the determined DMK is well on its campaign march.

For the Congress(I) in the state which has been basking in MGR's reflected glory, battling it alone is a formidable challenge. If Tamil Nadu is lost to the party, the rumblings of defeat could well resound across the north and cripple its morale during the crucial buildup to the general elections.

—LALITA DILEEP

INDIAN AIRLINES

Troubled Landings

Pilots start overflying ill-equipped airports

FOR tourists and air travellers it is turning out to be a season of travail. Air-India schedules had barely been restored to some semblance of normalcy when pilots struck again, this time on the domestic front. Starting from December 1, Indian Airlines (IA) pilots, citing safety considerations, started overflying 20 out of the 62 stations to which IA operates. The pilots said they would no longer take the responsibility of flying to airports which lack even minimal landing and navigational aids.

Cancelled flights: passenger distress

As a result, chaos reigned once again at airports and booking offices all over the country. And large numbers of stranded tourists added their outrage to the cries of protest because some of the busiest tourist centres—Agra, Khajuraho, Udaipur, Jodhpur and Aurangabad—overnight found themselves delinked from the IA network. This only endorsed India's reputation as the land of man-made uncertainties.

What was it that triggered off the crippling agitation by pilots? Safety, said the pilots in chorus. "We are no longer willing to be made the scapegoats for a system which forces us to fly to unsafe, ill-equipped airfields," said a spokesman of the Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA), which directed its members to overfly all airfields not equipped with instrument landing systems (ILS) and other landing aids. Blackmail, screamed the IA management. How was it that the airports the pilots had flown to, regularly and without complaint for 25 years, had now become unsafe all of a sudden, the management asked. Or did the latest agitation have something to do with the pilots' demand for a wage increase being negotiated these days.

There was some truth to both the assertions. The pilots have recently been at the receiving end of public opprobrium after the air crashes at Ahmedabad and Guwahati which are being attributed to pilot error despite the fact that the ILS at Ahmedabad was only partly operational on the day of the crash. But in the November 24 letter to the IA management, the pilots appended their wage demand to the notice announcing they would not fly to airports which lack landing aids. The IA management replied that the ICPA directive was intended "to disrupt the services and pressure the management in the settlement of your charter of demands".

Both sides appear to be indulging in arm-twisting. The pilots decided to act at a time when the IA management was demoralised and under attack for its lax

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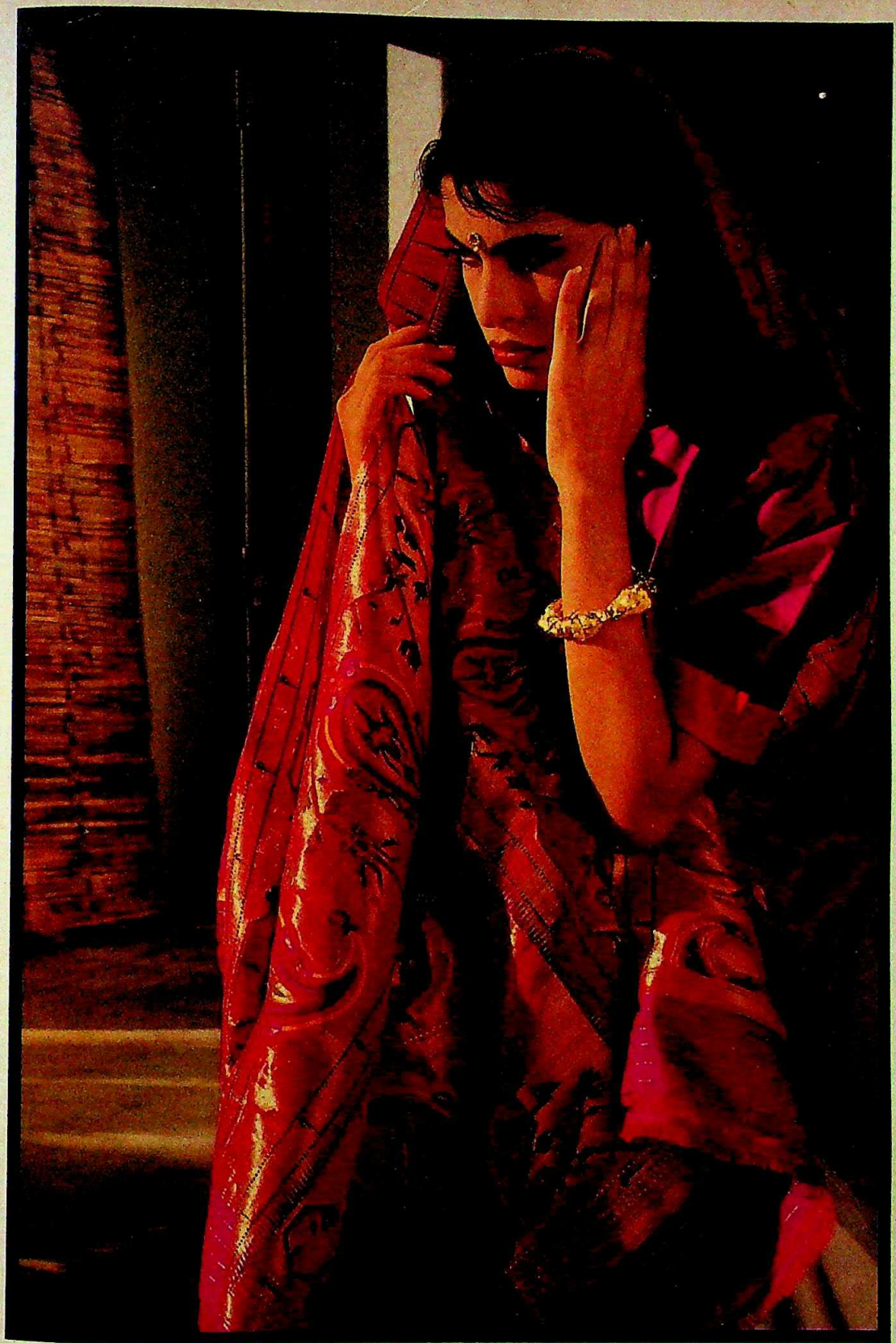

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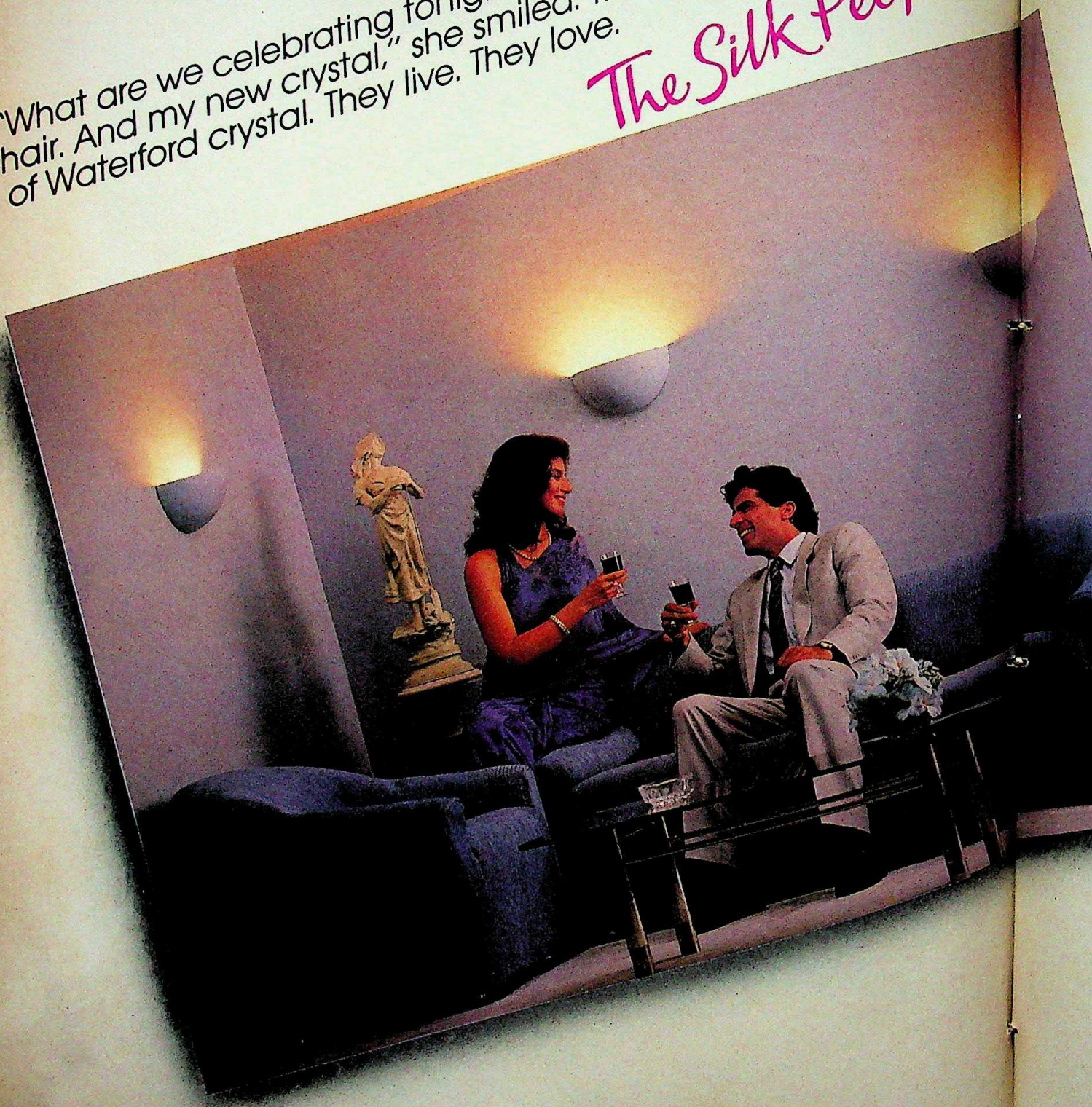
"What are we celebrating tonight?" he asked. "Your first grey hair. And my new crystal," she smiled. Their laughter, the tinkle of Waterford crystal. They live. They love.

The Silk People



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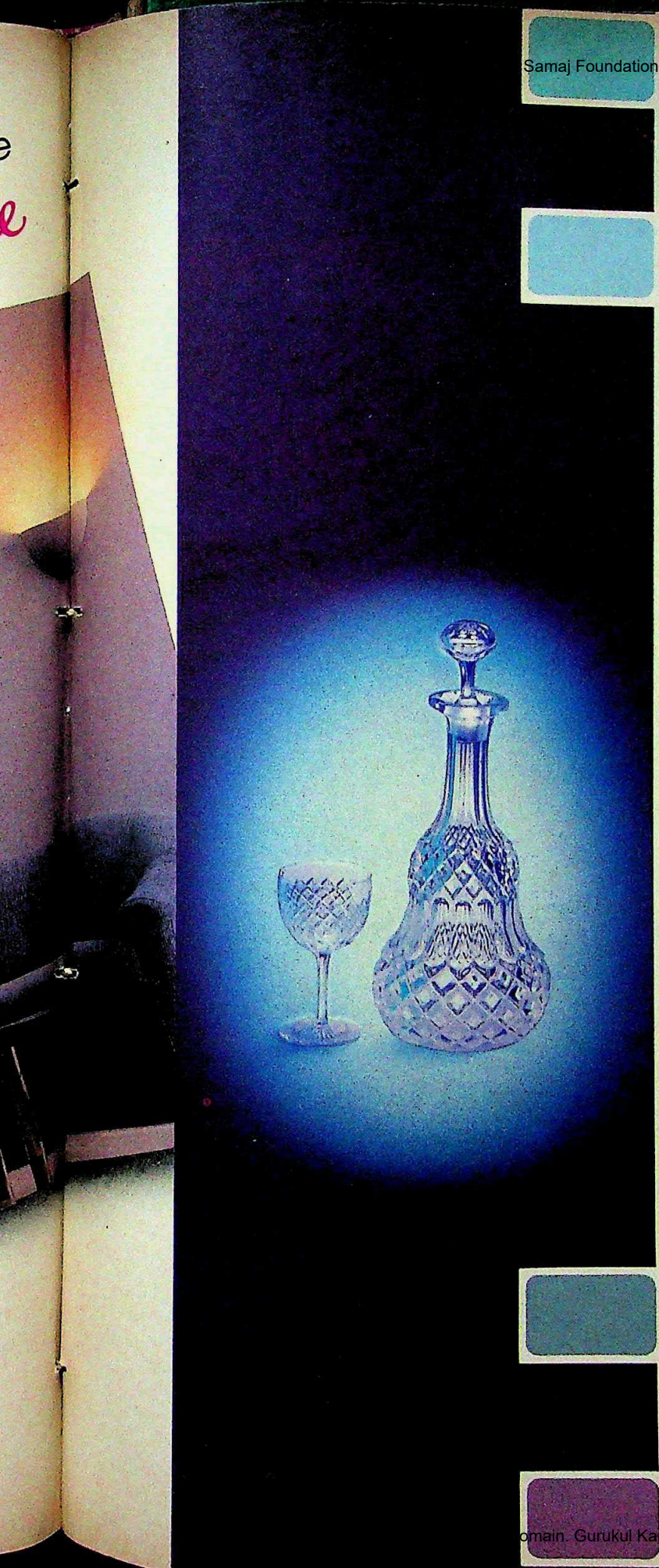

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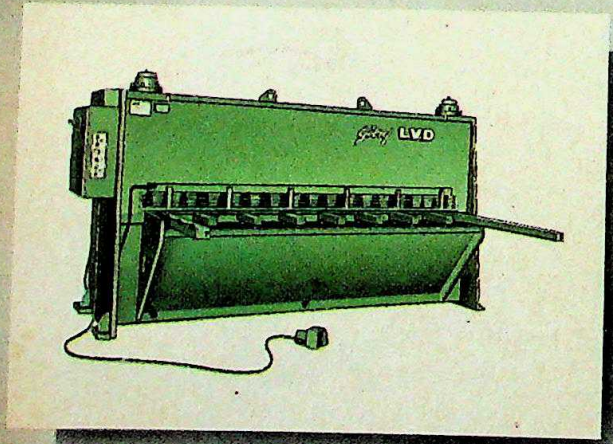

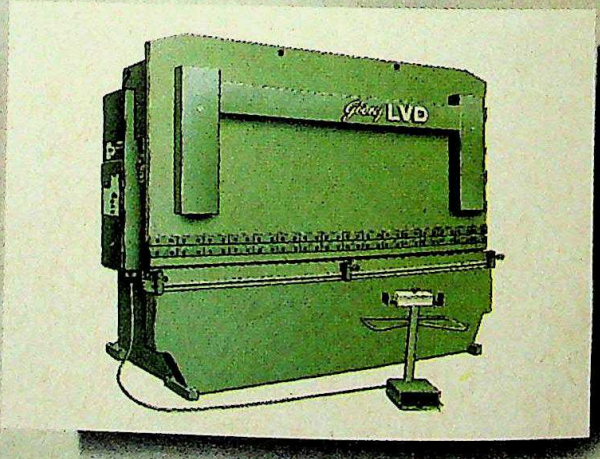

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safety standards: the safety argument provided a handy ploy. The management, on its part, used the agitation to shift part of the blame for its recent troubles on to the pilots. Unmindful of public distress, the pilots were pressuring the management by refusing to operate certain flights, the management charged.

"A pox on both your houses" is the response of the travelling public. On delayed flights these days it is not unusual to hear suggestions that the airlines should either be privatised or private airlines allowed to start competing with the state-run carriers.

While the IA management can, in fact, do precious little about providing navigational aids, because the concerned airports are owned either by the National Airports Authority (NAA) or the Defence Ministry, it is petulantly refusing to concede other justified demands of the pilots. For example, pilots who have to fly to Srinagar or Leh need woollen overcoats. The deputy managing director (operations) agreed to the demand but the managing director referred it to the 'uniform committee', at which it was suggested that the airline keep a couple of coats at the airport to be used by any pilots who felt cold. The pilots angrily refused to share coats saying that an airline which expects a profit of Rs 73 crore this year can afford to spend Rs 1.5 lakh on overcoats for the pilots.

As for landing aids, NAA Chairman Air Marshal C.K.S. Raje has suggested that:

- Non-directional beacons (NDBs) and VHF communication equipment are sufficient for airports used by turbo prop aircraft.
- Airfields to which jets flew would have NDBs, VHF and VOR (very high frequency omni range).
- ILS would be provided only at airfields with weather or terrain restrictions.

But the ICPA pilots remain adamant that they will not fly to airfields which did not have either an ILS, or a combination of VOR with VASI (visual approach slope indicator). They want a firm commitment from the ministry that these landing aids would be installed at all required airports before the new A 320 planes arrive in the middle of next year. Such a commitment would give the ministry a way out of the IA stalemate and harried and harassed air travellers would then be able to breathe a sigh of relief.

—RAMINDAR SINGH

DIPLOMACY

Embarrassing Exit

Pakistan's military attache is deported for espionage

PAKISTAN International Airlines (PIA) flight PK 271 that left Delhi for Islamabad early this month, carried two important passengers. On board was India's Ambassador to Pakistan, S.K. Singh, who carried the diplomatic brief for his first meeting with Benazir Bhutto after she became prime minister. Singh's fellow passenger was Brigadier Zaheer-ul-Islam Abbasi, the military attache at the Pakistani Embassy in New Delhi—who literally had a black eye.

The previous day, the senior Pakistani diplomat, accompanied by a non-diplomatic aide, Mohammed Ashraf, was caught in a seedy Delhi restaurant by counter-intelligence operatives while handing over a packet to an Indian contact. Indian agents had been keeping a watch on him for some time and on that day, a hidden video camera was discreetly recording the movements of the two men. As Abbasi handed a packet to his contact, more than half a dozen security-men pounced on him.

Brigadier Abbasi was proving to be a major irritant for South Block. His deportation had a clear diplomatic message.

Fifty-five minutes later, Abbasi's arrest was the second story in Doordarshan's national news-bulletin—ironically following the news of Benazir Bhutto being installed as prime minister in Islamabad. Predictably, Pakistani diplomats in the Indian capital were in a state of shock. They tried frantically to get in touch with Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon, but met with no success. "This was a shock. Abbasi was at best an overzealous attache who walked into a trap. But governments are rarely so rude and abrupt even with real spies," complained a Pakistani diplomat. The Pakistanis say the restaurant rendezvous was an obvious counter-intelligence trap.

Meanwhile, for more than four hours till midnight, Abbasi sat it out on an iron bench in a smelly room at Delhi's police headquarters. Next morning, Abbasi and his aide were declared *persona non grata* and asked to leave India within 24 hours. In the afternoon, their alleged contact man, a small-time Delhi lawyer, Subhash Chandra Dutta, was charged with violating the Official Secrets Act for possessing classified documents which related to military bases in Mathura and Agra in Uttar Pradesh.

The timing of the move was no coincidence

PTI

Brigadier Zaheer-ul-Islam Abbasi, (centre): undiplomatic games

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even if India had got rid of a diplomat who had for sometime been considered an irritant in certain military and intelligence circles. Abbasi had been boasting that he had successfully disinformed Indian defence analyst Ravi Rikhye, whose forthcoming book The *1989 Scenario* could embarrass South Block. Still in manuscript form, the book is a fictional account, in which Pakistan occupies Siachen. China annexes Arunachal Pradesh, while militants get 'Khalistan'. The curtain comes down with Soviet troops in New Delhi, and a military coup. Just a month back intelligence plants had appeared in a section of the media alleging that Rikhye had been won over by Abbasi and Pakistani air attache Group Captain Qazi Javed Ahmed. Journalists friendly with the attaches were also shadowed. Rikhye however denies the charge. "I was not out to cause embarrassment but was trying to caution the people that such a scenario could emerge," says he.

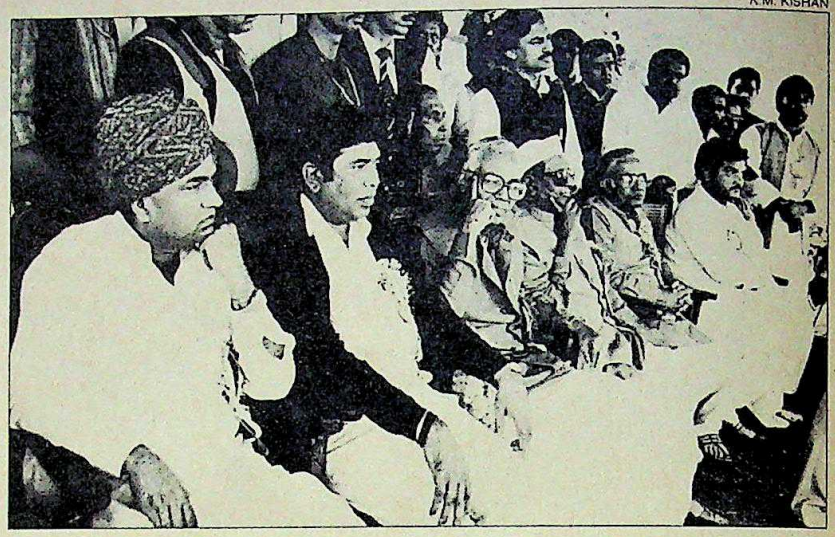
The Doordarshan bulletin underlined the fact that Abbasi was considered close to Zia and careful plants in newspapers the next day insinuated that he was a member of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence directorate. But the fact remains that all military attaches do intelligence work. The official publicity and the plants indicated that through the action India was sending Benazir a stern reminder that the problems between the two nations remained and that a beginning had to be made by cleaning up the legacy of hostility which the Indian foreign office has often attributed to the Zia regime. "We had to show them that we are no patsies," commented a senior foreign office official. At the same time, officially, a foreign office spokesman stressed: "We will very much like to put this episode in the past."

In Islamabad, however, this could rankle for a long time as an ill-timed slight. Some observers indeed question the wisdom behind the action as it could put the Benazir Government on the defensive rather than strengthen it.

Strangely enough, however, while the Pakistani ambassador in New Delhi Niaz A. Naik lodged a strong note of protest with South Block the official reaction in Islamabad was low-key. After deporting two lower ranking Indian diplomats in token retaliation, Islamabad seemed inclined to ignore the episode at least for the moment. Abbasi's may indeed have been the case of the spy who was left out in the cold.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

K.M. KISHAN



Pilot, Fernandes, Azad and others at a rally

BIHAR

Show of Strength

Mishra flexes his muscles

IT wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to say that when Jagannath Mishra blows hot, chief ministers of Bihar get cold shivers. Last fortnight, as the winter set in, it was the turn of Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad to receive the full blast of the former chief minister's ire. At a rally on December 3 to mark the 104th birth anniversary of Rajendra Prasad, Mishra who is a Member of Parliament announced the formation of a "non-political" organisation, the Bihar Jan Vikas Manch, that would work for "the socio-economic upliftment of the state". No one, least of all Azad, doubted the unsubtle political message that the formation of the new organisation conveyed: that Mishra could not be taken for granted and that if he was, he might well take the extreme step of forming a new regional party.

The message reached Delhi swiftly. Top Congress(I) leaders were sent to convince Mishra that the high command intended him no harm. Mishra was willing to be cajoled. He went to Delhi and issued a written statement that he had always held Rajiv Gandhi to be the leader of the party.

Azad's discomfiture was more pathetic because on the same day he too had addressed a rally at which he had criticised Mishra. But though top party leaders like AICC(I) Treasurer Sitaram Kesari, general secretaries Ghulam Nabi Azad and Oscar Fernandes, Youth Congress(I) President Mukul Wasnik and Union Minister of State for Surface Transport Rajesh Pilot were present, the rally was no match for Mishra's meeting.

Organised mainly by Shyam Sunder Singh Dhiraj, chief of the state Youth Congress(I), the rally had government support. The ailing Bihar State Road Transport Corporation was asked to provide 316 buses (28 per cent of its total fleet) on hire, and as many private buses were requisitioned. For Azad the rally was an opportunity to show the Central command that he had the support of the people. The message that the Central leaders got was quite different. Most of the buses were only half-filled and the cheers that greeted Azad's promise of acting against the mafia and criminals were not very enthusiastic.

In sharp contrast was the mood and attendance at the rally organised by Mishra. Over 35 dissident legislators turned up as did two party MPs. And the 10,000-capacity open air theatre where the rally was held overflowed with an eager crowd of students, youths, and party workers from the district units. Mishra was at pains to emphasise that the organisation he had formed, the Bihar Jan Vikas Manch, was apolitical. The Manch, he thundered, would not indulge in any politics except the "politics of development". His plans were ambitious. He was going, he said, to enlist 400,000 village level cadres who would work for social and economic development.

Mishra's rally was well-timed. Azad,

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sent to head the state just 10 months ago, has antagonised virtually every section of the party. Ranged against him is a motley collection of state politicians who have very little in common except their antipathy towards him—Speaker Shiv Chandra Jha, Union Minister and former chief minister Bindeshwari Dubey, Union Ministers of State L.P. Sahi and Krishna Sahi. And as if this were not sufficient, Governor Govind Narain Singh has made no attempt to hide his displeasure with Azad.

So in choosing this moment to expose Azad's lack of a mass base, Mishra, who has a sizeable following, knew he was assured of support, not for ascending the chief minister's throne himself, but for dismissing Azad. Whoever the Centre chooses to replace him will prove less hostile and more tractable thereby assuring Mishra his position as the real centre of power in Bihar.

SINCE the death of Lok Dal(B) leader Karpoori Thakur, the Opposition in Bihar has been left without a really popular leader. What the Congress(I) possibly fears is that Mishra could fill that vacuum by forming a regional party. That is an eventuality it cannot afford in its present beleaguered state. In the next general elections, a difference of a few seats could mean being in the Opposition instead of forming the Government. And Bihar is too important a state to risk losing. It would be far less dangerous to sacrifice Azad. This argument may have so far sounded doubtful to the Centre. But the success of Mishra's rally and the popular support that he has proved he possesses should remove any doubts.

At a meeting in Delhi soon after, Rajesh Pilot is believed to have apologised to Mishra for the abuses heaped on him by Azad and Sitaram Kesari. And in a bid to show Mishra that the Centre regarded him as an important figure in Bihar politics, Oscar Fernandes had a prolonged discussion with him reviewing the political situation in the state after Azad took over. Master of compromises and temporary alliances that he is, Mishra also had a meeting with Bindeshwari Dubey whose exit from the state's chief ministership he himself had engineered.

For the present, no one in Bihar is in any doubt about whose star is on the ascendant in the political firmament of Bihar. Certainly not that of Bhagwat Jha Azad.

—FARZAND AHMED

JAGANNATH MISHRA

"All parties have failed"

CONGRESS(I) leaders out of power tend to wither away. Not Jagannath Mishra. Five years out of power only seem to have added to his fighting spirit. By announcing the formation of the Bihar Jan Vikas Manch, Mishra demonstrated that he still means business. In an interview with Principal Correspondent FARZAND AHMED, *Mishra expressed his views on the political situation. Excerpts:*

Q. *Why did you form the new Manch?*

A. I felt that the mass support (for me) should be channelised and used for the socio-economic transformation of the state. All political parties have failed in this area and the vacuum has been filled by extremists.

Q. *Does this mean that even the Congress(I) has become irrelevant in this regard?*

A. Yes, Yes. The Congress(I) too has become irrelevant to the situation.

Q. *Then why have you issued a signed statement in Delhi expressing full faith in the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi and Congress(I) policies?*

A. There is nothing new in it. I am with Rajiv Gandhi. I am with the Congress(I). But like every Congress(I) worker I have the right to criticise party policies.

Q. *Do you mean that the Centre and the state leaders have been pursuing anti-Bihar policies?*

A. I hold the state parties and leaders more guilty than the Central leadership.

Q. *Do you think that the Congress(I) under the leadership of Rajiv Gandhi has a future?*

A. (pause). *Achchha hai, thik hai* (It's okay, it's all right). But the situation has definitely changed and 1988 is not 1984. *Jo hai woh thik hai* (whatever is, it's all right).

Q. *What do you mean when you say you have no confidence in the state's leaders?*

A. The people of Bihar are committed to the cause of Bihar. Foisting leaders who do not share this concern leads to a loss of confidence, so people don't feel involved.

Q. *You are regarded as a chronic dissident. For example, after extending whole-hearted support to Bhagwat Jha Azad you suddenly started attacking him and his government?*

A. It is true that I have got that image. I am forced to be a dissident because I can't tolerate people being let down by the Government. I turned against Azad when he tried to suppress the extent of damage caused by the earthquake and misled the prime minister.

Q. *Supporters of Azad claim that you are trying to dislodge him because of his ruthless anti-corruption actions.*

A. The fact is that instead of fighting corruption he has institutionalised it. If he was honestly fighting corruption why did he sack Shakeel-ur-Rahman, the vice-chancellor of L.N. Mithila University. Rahman had launched a crusade against corruption on the campus.

Q. *How do you react to the demand by certain leaders to expel you from the party?*

A. This demand is very old—the late Chandrashekhar Singh, Bindeshwari Dubey and their supporters and now Azad and his supporters are making the same demand. I don't give much importance to such utterances.

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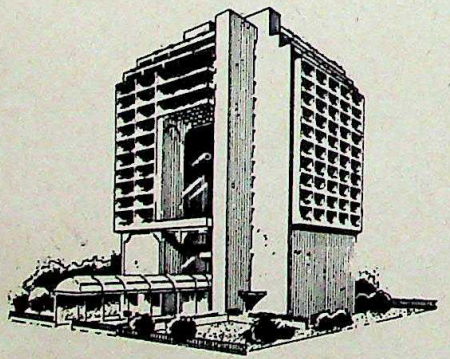

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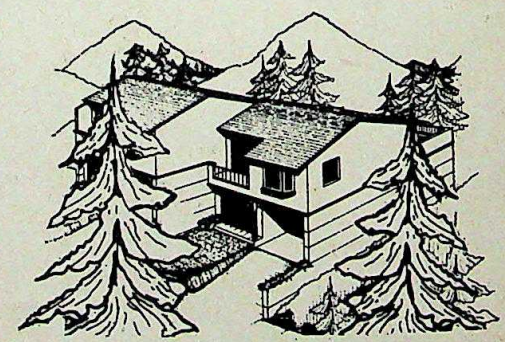

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During research studies in the forties at the Burroughs Wellcome laboratories in the United States, Dr. George Hitchings and Dr. Gertrude Elion discovered that the genes of healthy cells process information differently from those of cancerous cells and disease-causing bacteria and viruses. The finding was to have immense significance, not only for them, but for the entire research community.

On the basis of the discovery, Hitchings and Elion were able to develop drugs that selectively blocked the growth of cancerous cells and disease-causing organisms, with minimum damage to normal human cells. Thus establishing an approach that has led to new drug therapies across the world.

In the period 1951-60, Hitchings and Elion developed the anti-malarial pyrimethamine (Daraprim), and 6-mercaptopurine and thioguanine for the treatment of leukemia.

In 1957, they synthesized azathioprine (Imuran), a drug that helps prevent rejection in organ transplants.

Six years later, they discovered allopurinol (Zyloric), the drug of choice in the treatment of gout and other urate disorders.

The anti-bacterial trimethoprim, the main constituent of co-trimoxazole (Septran) was another important discovery.

More recently, by applying the principles established by Hitchings and Elion, fellow researchers at Wellcome have developed the compound acyclovir (Zovirax), the first effective drug in the treatment of herpes virus infections, and zidovudine (Retrovir), the most successful drug so far developed to treat symptoms of the AIDS virus.

The Nobel award to Dr. Hitchings and Dr. Elion is a rare recognition for research done in the commercial drug industry.

Sir James Black discovered two landmark compounds: propanolol, in 1964, revolutionized the treatment of heart disease and hypertension, and in 1972, cimetidine, the breakthrough drug for the treatment of peptic ulcer. It is significant that Sir James held the position of Director of Therapeutic Research at The Wellcome Research Laboratories, UK from 1978 to 1984. It was during this period that he received the knighthood.

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BIHAR

New Gambit

BJP's changing stance

IT is yet another election gambit but it has caught many unawares. A rightist party has changed its political line and clamoured for a separate state, with an eye to the coming elections, stressing all the while its commitment to "integral humanism" and "national integrity".

Last month, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a movement for a smaller "Vananchal state" comprising the Chhotanagpur-Santhal Parganas region in Bihar to counter the demand for a "Jharkhand state". With this, the BJP not only made its election strategy clear but displayed its changing, aggressive role in politics.

Party chief Lal Krishna Advani, who announced the campaign at a rally in Ranchi last month, says the demand cannot be dubbed separatist as it aims at the "uplift and welfare" of tribals. Adds BJP General Secretary Murli Manohar Joshi: "Indian nationalism will flourish in Vananchal."

The demand for Vananchal, comprising 12 districts (population: two crore), is in reality directed against the Church with its great influence on tribals in the region. At the rally, Advani repeatedly demanded a ban on the flow of "foreign money" to private institutions and a ban on the entry of foreign missionaries. Such funds, he said, were being used for anti-national purposes and the missionaries "preached hatred in the name of religion".

The BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) suspect that the missionaries not only convert tribals but also back the demand for a Jharkhand state covering districts of Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. This demand, they say, is directed against *"dikus"* (outsiders and non-tribals).

Senior BJP leader and MLA Durgadas Rathor claims the party has a strong base in the region, and so the question of vote-politics being behind the move for Vananchal does not arise. Of the party's 15 MLAs, 11 belong to the region. But All India Jharkhand Party leader N.E. Hiro dismisses the claim. "The Vananchal demand is a hoax. I am sure the BJP will forget about it after the poll," he says.

However, according to party sources, the movement was planned at the BJP meeting at Jamshedpur in August and endorsed by the party leadership at the highest level.

Advani addressing a rally in Ranchi

SHAMIM BHAI

Before the drive was undertaken, the RSS and its front organisations, including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Banbasi Kalyan Sangh, mounted a strong "Hindu revivalist wave" reclaiming a number of converted tribals. They also tried to match the missionaries in social services. Predictably, the activities led to tension between the Church and the organisations.

According to one estimate, the VHP set up over 40 centres in the region and engaged in building and rebuilding temples, hospitals and schools. And as the influence of the Church weakened, it tried to bargain with the ruling Congress(I) for protection of its services in the fields of education and health care. A delegation of priests held a meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he visited Ranchi in May.

The BJP, meanwhile, is trying to win over a section of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha to the Vananchal cause even as the Jharkhand Coordination Committee(JCC) adopts a more aggressive posture to press its demand for a Jharkhand state. Says JCC convener B.P. Kesari: "We are not disturbed by the BJP programme. Ours is a nationality question."

The recent developments indicate that the RSS is gradually adopting the BJP as its political arm, bringing it to the pre-1977 position of the erstwhile Jan Sangh. Many RSS workers with political skills are being despatched to assist state units of the BJP. The process began with Bhaorao Deoras, general secretary of the RSS and younger brother of the chief Balasaheb Deoras, being put in charge of political affairs to guide the BJP. Govindacharya, RSS pracharak, has been deputed as special assistant to Advani.

Under the RSS shadow the BJP has already started poll exercises in a big way. Sources within the BJP claim that the party has broken new ground even in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The demand for Vananchal could well be a step towards consolidating its election strategy.

—FARZAND AHMED

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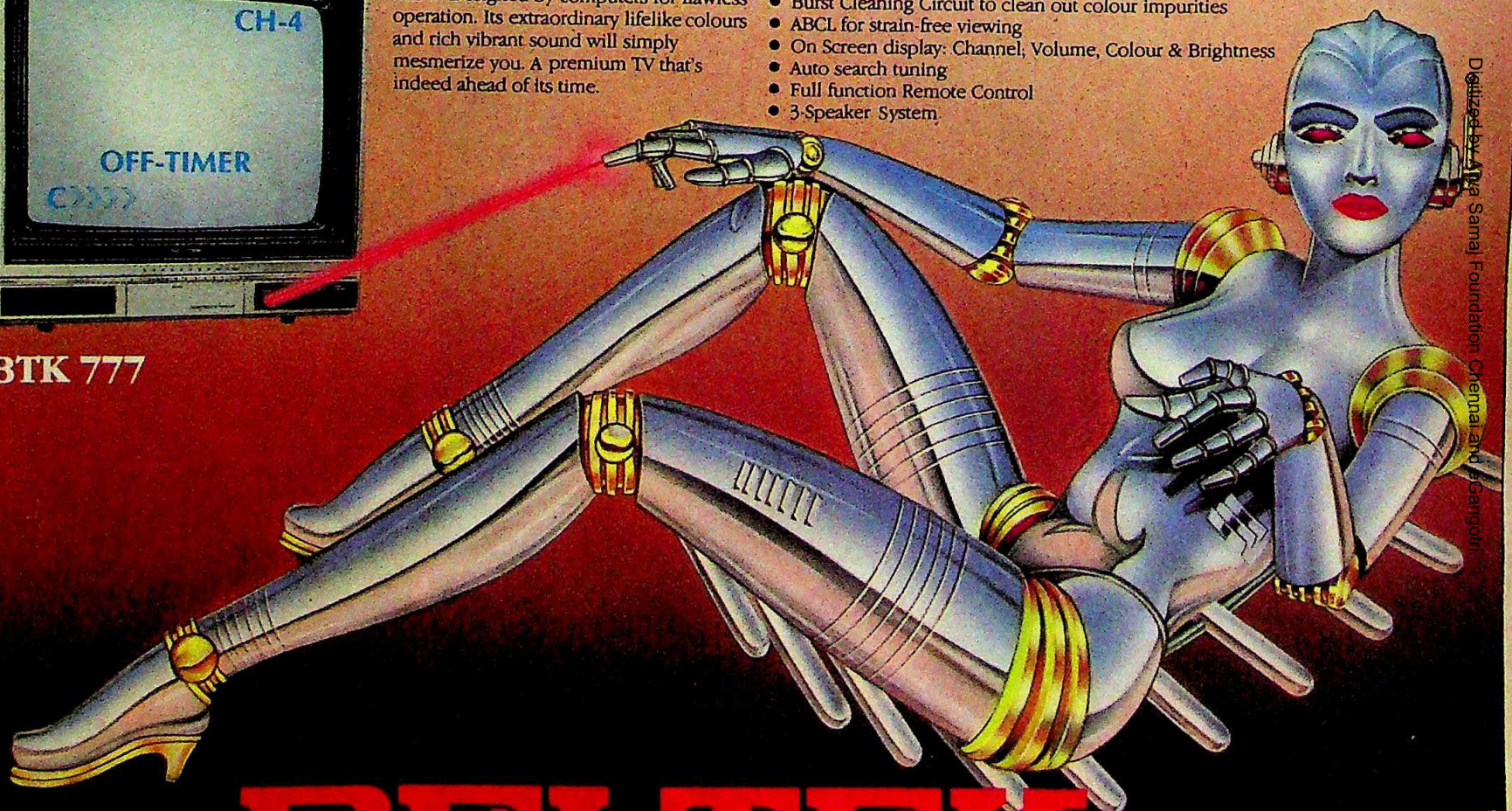

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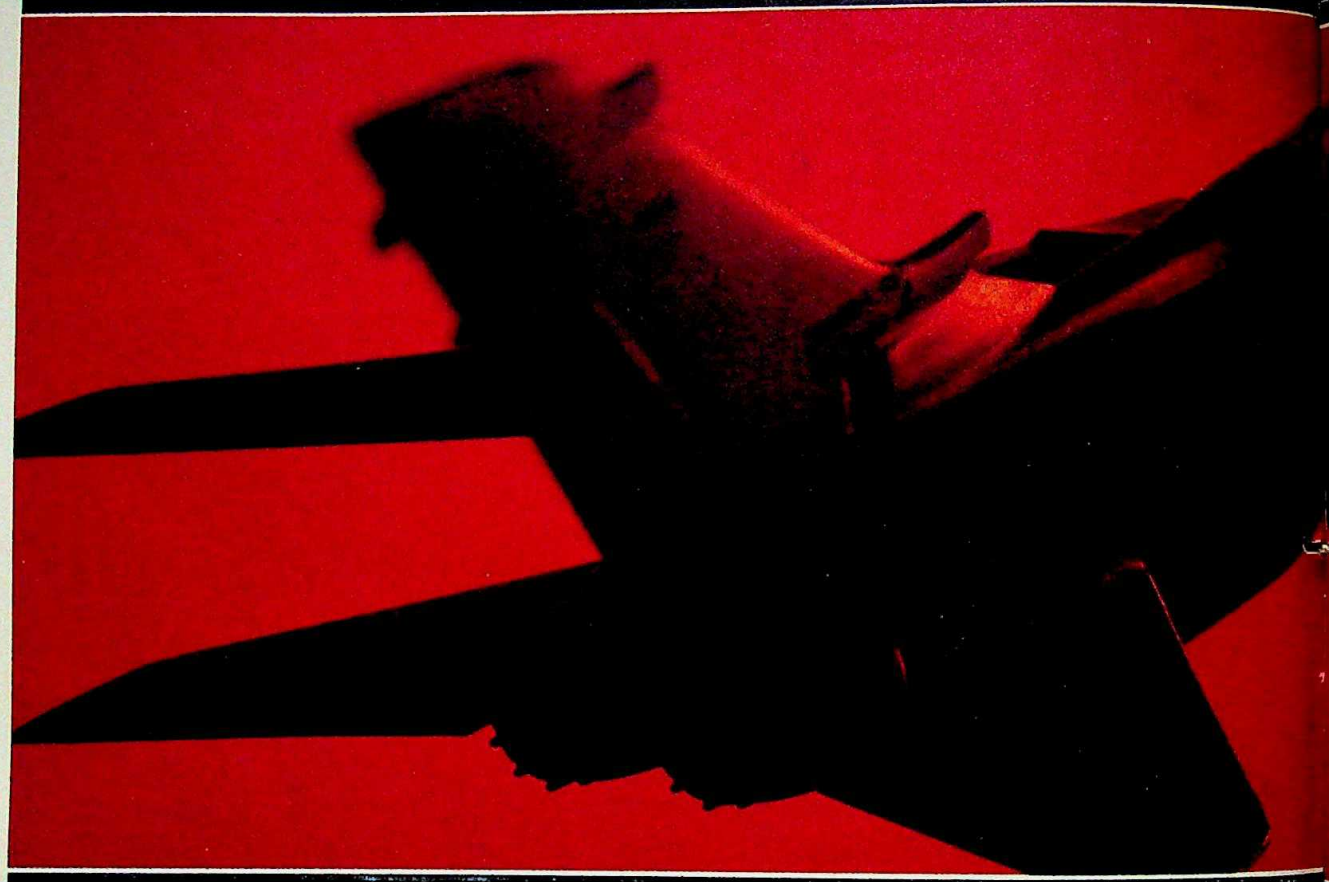

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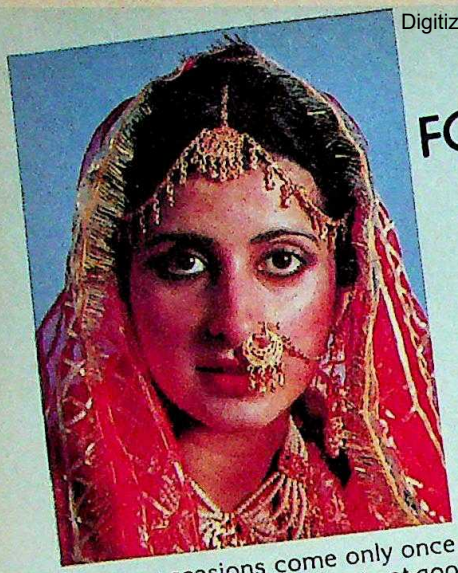

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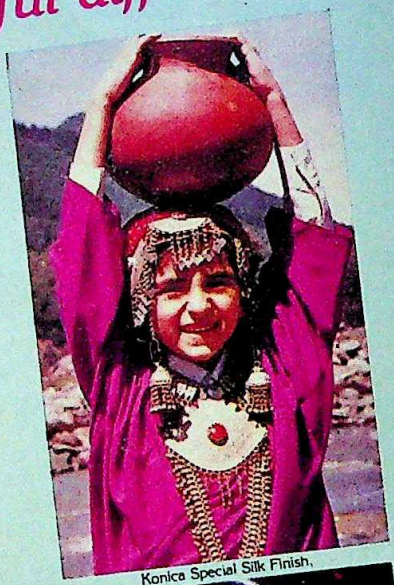

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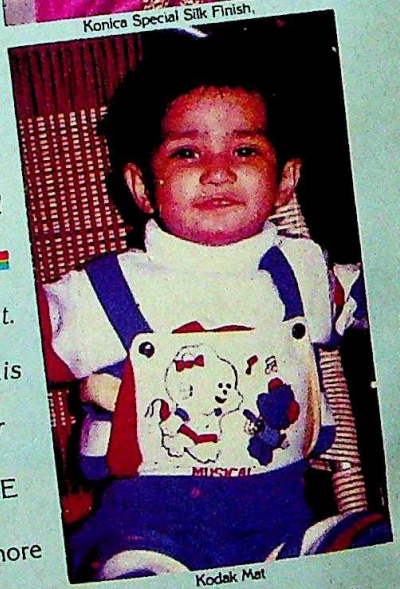

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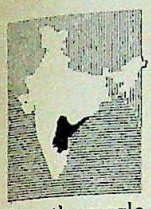
ANDHRA PRADESH

Damp Squib

Rama Rao discloses his assets



IT was time for the flashback. In a span of 60 minutes, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao offered a fleeting glimpse of his life before his switch from the razzle-dazzle of the tinsel world to the rough and tumble of politics. It came last fortnight, in the form of an announcement of his assets before a sceptical press. And it had all the ingredients of drama—pathos, surprise, disbelief and then, a complete let-down.

Ever since the convenor of the National Front, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, had made public his assets, Rama Rao had been under nagging pressure to follow suit. At Hyderabad and in Delhi at every meeting with the media, he had been faced with this question. The chief minister's statements that his "life is an open book" and that he had "nothing to hide", had been flung at him with disdain. But the heat was turned on when Rama Rao started his campaigns against Governor Kumudben Joshi for her stalling tactics in signing the order to appoint a Lok Ayukta. His detractors chipped in with the accusation that Rama Rao was keeping himself outside the purview of the Lok Ayukta to avoid any probe into his assets. Finally on November 22, when the Andhra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee President N. Janardhan Reddy declared that he would announce details of the chief minister's personal assets within 10 days and dismissed Rama Rao's promise about divulging his assets as a mere political stunt, he decided he had had enough.

Without waiting for Reddy's deadline to expire, the chief minister, returning from Warangal district after laying the foundation for an irrigation project on December 2, drove straight to the secretariat to keep his appointment with the press for a "very important" announcement. After greeting reporters he asked with a flourish: "Where's the hero? We are waiting for the sealed cover." A diffident Chief Secretary G.R. Nair then announced that he would be back in a few minutes with the document. Soon Nair vanished into his office and returned with the all-important cover. Prising it open, the chief secretary showed his audience another sealed cover from which a single sheet listing the assets was taken out. "The photocopier has been arranged here," said the chief minister's secretary Sanjeeva Reddy. Within minutes copies were distributed to all.

There ended the theatre and the rest was a let-down. The list showed that Rama Rao had two houses in Madras, 20 acres of farm land in Rangareddy district and, apart from some shares, National Savings Certificates and compulsory deposits, 1,836 grammes of jewellery and silverware worth Rs 1 lakh. It, however, did not mention any house in Hyderabad. Nor did the 2.62 acre plot on the outskirts of Hyderabad, which houses his *kuteeram* and the Telugu Desam office, figure anywhere. His house in the busy Abids area where he is available during the day, the glass house in Jubilee Hills in which his son-in-law and confidant N. Chandrababu Naidu stays, and the cluster of four houses of the same design and size in the Humayun Nagar area of the city, were also missing conspicuously. Nor was there any information about the cine studios, cinemas and film distribution company.

"My property has been handed down by tradition to my children, like everyone else in the country," Rama Rao remarked before he began the run through his life. Tracing his life from his birth in 1923 Rama Rao recounted, with feeling, the ups and downs and the influence of his parents, particularly his mother. He spoke of his college days when he met Bhavanam Venkatram, a former Congress(I) chief minister of the state (1981-82) and now Jan Morcha leader, and his entry into films. "I worked as a sub-registrar briefly and one senior official told me to try my luck in films if I wanted to support my family," recalled Rama Rao.

The chief minister said, in a generous tribute, that it was Nadendla Bhaskara Rao—his lieutenant who ditched him in 1984 and had him thrown out of office briefly—and some others who invited him to join politics on his turning 60. "I was the highest paid actor at that time. The people's support and request made me enter politics," he recalled.

Rama Rao denied that he had been forced into announcing details of his assets. "If Rajiv Gandhi thinks he is responsible to the people, let him declare his assets and set an example," said he. The Congress(I) was not impressed. Said Janardhan Reddy: "These are all bogus things." But BJP General Secretary Bandaru Dattatreya had a different view: "It can set off a healthy trend in politics."

Now, it is the turn of his ministers to emulate Rama Rao. "He is my father, guru and *daivam* (God). I have not earned a pie after entering politics," said Tourism Minister Dr Alladi P. Rajkumar, giving details of his family properties. Others are also calling in accountants before they announce that they too have not made "a pie after entering politics".

—AMARNATH K. MENON

BABJI/JANATA STUDIO

Chief Secretary G.R. Nair shows the assets papers: not all there

The list showed Rama Rao had two houses in Madras but there was no mention of any house in Hyderabad or of the 2.62 acre plot.

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Company Meeting

THE ASSOCIATED CEMENT COMPANIES LIMITED

Statement of the Chairman, Mr. N.A. Palkhivala

(52nd Annual General Meeting at the Birla Matushri Sabhagar, 19, Sir Vithaldas Thackersey Marg, Bombay-400 020, on Wednesday, December 21, 1988, at 3.45 p.m.)

"Unfortunately, in our country business is expected to be run on government lines, whereas we should insist on government being run on business lines. To become trim and profitable, your Company had consciously to make some hard, unpleasant decisions."

"Here is a land in which a few are spectacularly rich while the masses remain abjectly poor ... where freedom and its blessings are a reality for a minority and an illusion for the many ... a land consecrated to democracy but ... a land of privilege and rank ... a republic dedicated to equality but mired in an archaic system of caste." No words could describe more accurately the situation in India – the country potentially great but in a state of all-pervasive moral decay. (Actually the words are borrowed from the late Benigno Aquino who was speaking about the Philippines.)

This month Europe celebrated the centennial of the birth of Jean Monnet, who as a private citizen did far more to ensure the formation of the European Economic Community than men in high public offices. (Incidentally, when the First World War was raging, Sri Aurobindo spelt out the imperative need for a union of the States of Europe and, therefore, the inevitability of it. In 1916, Sri Aurobindo spoke of "The United States of Europe". In 1946 when Winston Churchill used that phrase, he was applauded on the assumption that it had never been used before.)

Rebirth of the region

It would be most appropriate if the centenary of Jean Monnet could see the strengthening of a similar organization in our part of the world – the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). At present SAARC may be truthfully described as a pregnancy rather than a birth. Bangla Desh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka must come together and work in a spirit of friendly co-operation with the conviction that they have to share a common future. The economies of all the seven countries would then benefit greatly. (For instance, the potential market in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangla Desh and Nepal for surplus Indian cement is two million tonnes per annum.) **Enormous resources which are wasted by India and Pakistan annually on defence and armaments could be diverted to economic and social uplift of our peoples. It would really transform the entire future of more than one-fifth of the human race who inhabit these countries. It would result in the technological and industrial rebirth of the whole region. The foundation of our regional prosperity would be the binding tie of cohesive sentiment.**

The democratic elections in Pakistan this month offer a golden opportunity which should not be missed. India – by far the strongest nation in the group – can afford to be not only fair but generous and magnanimous. **We should stretch out our hand of friendship and goodwill to the new Pakistan government. Goodwill is communicable and friendship is infectious.**

If active co-operation between India and Pakistan seems a hopeless dream today, let us go back in history and see how often the laughable idealism of one generation has become the accepted commonplace of the next. If Japan and the USA can live together in amity after the holocaust of the Second World War, if France and Germany can regard themselves as each other's most valued trading partner after more than a century of bitterness and belligerence, if the Soviet Union and China can forget their differences of decades, – it should be much easier for the SAARC countries to become firm allies. **After all, we are culturally akin, ethnically identical, linguistically knit, geographically close, historically related. Sri Aurobindo who had predicted the formation of the United States of Europe when the idea seemed to be wholly chimerical, expressed his firm conviction on 15th August 1947 that India and Pakistan (which included Bangla Desh) were bound to come together in some sort of confederation, if not a federation.**

The Indian economic scene

The low-growth syndrome continues to brood over the Indian economic scene. We keep on tackling breezily fifty-year problems with five-year plans, staffed by two-year officials, working with one-year appropriations, – fondly hoping that somehow the laws of economics will be suspended because we are Indians.

With the elections soon or late next year, economic wisdom will probably be asked to take a back seat. The claptrap of socialism is likely to be heard more frequently in the months to come. Our politicians, who were never renowned for the acute sensitivity of their economic antennae, revel in the eighth deadly sin – ideology. Myth matters more than reality in electoral politics.

When will the nation wake up to the fact that the administration of direct and indirect tax laws is today in a more chaotic state than ever before in this century? The painful truth is that in the vast arsenal of Indian bureaucracy, justice and fairness are negotiable commodities. **A sense of justice and fairness is not inherent in the Indian psyche, – witness the institutions of 'sati' and untouchability, and the squalor in which millions exist in stinkingly rich cities.**

The evil is compounded by the fact that we lack the requisite political culture – the set of institutions, attitudes and habits needed to make democracy work efficiently. The one-man-one-vote rite flourishes, but government flounders.

The cement industry

Sandwiched between rising costs of inputs and declining prices of products, the cement industry is going through a difficult phase.

The increase, last September, of Rs. 47 per tonne in the levy price of cement was too

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little and too late. Over the years the government has surprisingly not implemented the recommendation of the Bureau of Industrial Costs and Prices that the levy price of cement should be considered for revision every six months. Reserve Bank studies indicate that the cement industry's profit after tax as a percentage of net worth, which was 33.9 per cent in 1982-83, declined sharply over the next four years and turned negative in 1986-87.

As the installed capacity of the cement industry has doubled since 1982, there is today an excess of two million tonnes of supply over effective demand. Inspite of this surplus which will stay with us for a while, the government continues the four-decade strangulating control over the industry, in the mitigated form of levy cement. **It cannot be too often repeated that the citizen has to continue subsidizing the purchases of cement by the government at a price below the cost of production. The last remnant of the controls of a bygone era – the pork barrels for political patronage and corruption – must now go. With the glut of cement as a universally admitted fact, the industry should at least now be allowed to breathe freely in the free market.**

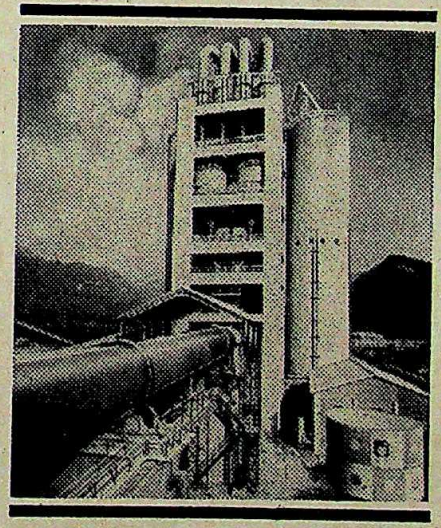
The Jute Packaging Materials (Compulsory Use in Packing Commodities) Act, 1987, is typical of the aberrations to which a government is prone when it puts politics in front of economics. The Act compels the industry to pack 65 per cent of its cement production in jute bags if the plants are located beyond 1200 kms. from Calcutta, and 70 per cent if the plants are within 1200 kms. of Calcutta.

New technology swamps the world, but time is made to stand still in India. Consumers in all continents now get cement packed in high density polyethylene (HDPE) bags which are far superior. Cement being a fine powdery material and the texture of jute bags being porous, the seepage in transit and on multiple handling can be as high as five per cent when the product in jute bags reaches the consumer. The estimated loss on account of jute packaging would be to the tune of one and a half million tonnes out of a targeted production of 43.5 million tonnes for 1988-89. **The jute packaging order is a disgrace to any progressive country. It is neither reasonable nor in the interests of the general public.**

Cement roads

I strongly urge the authorities to take up the construction of concrete roads which, though initially more expensive to construct, last much longer and involve little maintenance cost. Today they account for barely one per cent of our road network. Concrete roads provide a smooth and abrasion-resistant surface. Road transport operators would think it a boon to ply their vehicles on such roads, as their expenses on fuel, tyres and maintenance would decline dramatically.

The government has already raised a cess on the prices of petrol and diesel to augment the Central Road Fund. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank have agreed to finance about a score of road projects involving an outlay of nearly Rs. 900 crores. The construction of concrete roads would enable the cement industry to work to full capacity and the surplus production – which is expected to touch four or five million tonnes by the end of the Seventh Plan – could be utilized to great public benefit.



The Company's working

The Directors' Report highlights the main features of your Company's working during the year. No organization which works at a loss can discharge its basic duties towards workers and customers, towards government and society. **Unfortunately, in our country business is expected to be run on government lines, whereas we should insist on government being run on business lines. To become trim and profitable, your Company had consciously to make some hard, unpleasant decisions.**

Nothing is more distressing for a company than to shut down or sell away its plants, or to give up the manufacture of a product it has sold for years, or to reduce the number of its employees. Your Company had to make and implement all the three decisions which gnaw the heart.

We are all under a sentence of death, – only the execution of the sentence is stayed for an unknown period of time:

"Life is but a wintry day;
Some come to breakfast,
and away;
Others to dinner stay
And are full fed;
The oldest man but sups
And goes to bed."

It is the same with plants and products which have a life span like human beings.

We had to sell off the CATAD unit at Thane and the outdated cement plants at Dwarka and Sevalia. Their buyers have the potential to put them to other uses and the freedom not to operate under the constraints which afflict your Company.

I have no doubt that the steps we have taken are in the right direction. I believe the worst is over, and we can look forward to the unfolding future with hope and confidence.

I would like to say how much I have personally admired the perceptive, firm and strong leadership which Mr. B.K. Banerjee – the Managing Director, who resigned for personal reasons – gave your Company at a critical juncture. We are fortunate in having been able to engage the services of Dr. Subrata Ganguly, an outstanding technocrat who, you may be sure, will successfully steer your Company through the challenges that lie ahead.

The shareholders will join me in expressing appreciation of the dedicated work done by one and all in your Company. As I have said before, the ACC family – which knows no barriers of caste or clan, creed or tongue – is a microcosm of what the nation ought to be.

Bombay, November 28, 1988

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ROGER ACC. 19/88

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NATIONAL FRONT

Grappling On

Dissent over new executive

HERE they go again. That was the first reaction of the nation when the newly born Janata Dal's constituents re-enacted their oft-repeated drama last fortnight: once again they grappled for turf and personal power at the cost of unity among the Opposition. The stage for this renewed bickering was set as soon as the Janata Dal's President-elect, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, announced the names of the party's national executive.

Going by the number of office-bearers—138 in the national executive and 22 in the steering committee—none could doubt that Singh had gone many extra kilometres in order to please just about anybody with a recognisable name. But in the backstabbing and power-grabbing that's become the *leitmotif* of the opposition unity game, if you give them a kilometre they demand a mile.

The first voice of dissent was that of former Janata president Ajit Singh. He found the composition of the two bodies unacceptable in terms of the representation given to his supporters. A sulking Ajit offered to disengage from the new executive. Ajit's hurt was understandable. Only a day earlier Singh had asked him to suggest the names of Janata candidates for the executive and Ajit had picked 65. The final selection came as a shock to him. Excluded were prominent people like Syed Shahabuddin, MP, Satyapal Yadav (Uttar Pradesh opposition leader), Jayant Malhotra (Janata Party treasurer), Kalyan Singh Kalvi (Rajasthan state Janata chief), and Tarif Singh (Delhi Janata chief), while unknown names were included. "We have been working for opposition unity for quite some time. We've also forgone posts for this. If they do not want us now it is a matter of their priorities," said Ajit.

The Janata dissidents within the new party claimed that mathematically they had received a raw deal especially when compared to the representation given to Devi Lal's Lok Dal. The new party's main components are Ajit Singh's Lok Dal(A) (which had merged into the Janata); Chandra Shekhar's Janata; Devi Lal's Lok Dal(B); and V.P. Singh's Jan Morcha. The dissidents argued that the representation should have been proportioned on the basis of the strength enjoyed by the various constituent parties during the pre-merger days.

They said that Lok Dal(B) with 42 members in the new executive was given an unfair advantage over Lok Dal(A) which was given 18 members. The representation from states like Uttar Pradesh, they claimed, was also skewed. For example, in Uttar Pradesh the Janata has 78 MLAs, but they got only 13 seats on the executive compared to Lok Dal(B) which with 28 MLAs bagged 14 seats, while Jan Morcha with 19 MLAs got 19. Fumed a Janata MLA from Uttar Pradesh: "Satyapal Yadav was not found fit for the executive, when unheard names from the Jan Morcha have been included."

But Singh was firm. He declined to expand the two lists, but as a compromise made provision for inducting former chief ministers and MLAs in the national executive as special invitees. He added that 50 per cent of the leaders on the new bodies represented backward classes, women and the Scheduled Castes, "which was not to be tinkered with".

Clearly, Singh dropped some Janata men to accommodate smaller leaders with an eye to strengthen the party's grassroot hold. Older leaders like Morarji Desai, I.K. Gujral and General S.K. Sinha were included to give it respectability. Singh's supporters are confident that after some initial grumbling, those feeling left out will accept the decision or face the prospect of being excluded from what has now clearly emerged as the mainstream of opposition politics.

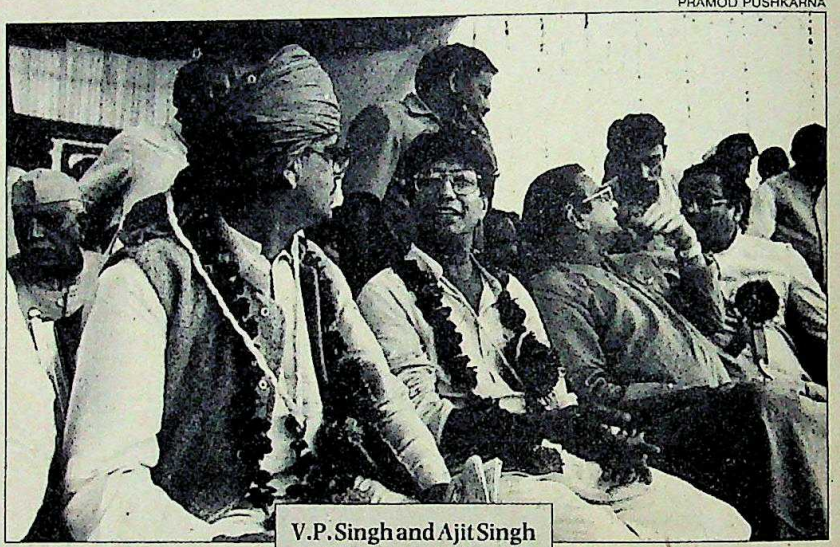
But the rebels remained defiant. Many rang up party chief Chandra Shekhar who was in London and also drafted a letter to Singh listing their grievances. Among other things they demanded the 'one-man-one-post' formula—clearly directed at Haryana Chief Minister Devi Lal who is also jockeying for the key post of the Janata Dal's Parliamentary Board chairmanship.

The Lok Dal constituent leaders, satisfied with their piece of cake, criticised Ajit Singh's men for creating problems in the unity moves. They argued that the representation of various groups was judicious. Said Sharad Yadav: "Janata Party as a group has been given sufficient seats. They should not complain."

The wrangling has, however, done damage to the image of the Janata Dal as a party full of power-hungry politicians even as it is being born. But some veteran leaders, who have seen even fiercer battles for power in their former political avatars, maintain that things will quieten down. Said Arun Nehru: "Differences of opinion cannot be called dissent. Such differences are the hallmark of a democratic party. We prefer differences to a despotic party set-up like the Congress. This is our strength." But in the present scenario, that is like looking at the silver lining and ignoring the dark cloud.

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA



V.P. Singh and Ajit Singh at a Janata Dal rally in Uttar Pradesh

Janata dissidents claim they have received a raw deal in the national executive compared to the representation given to the Lok Dal.

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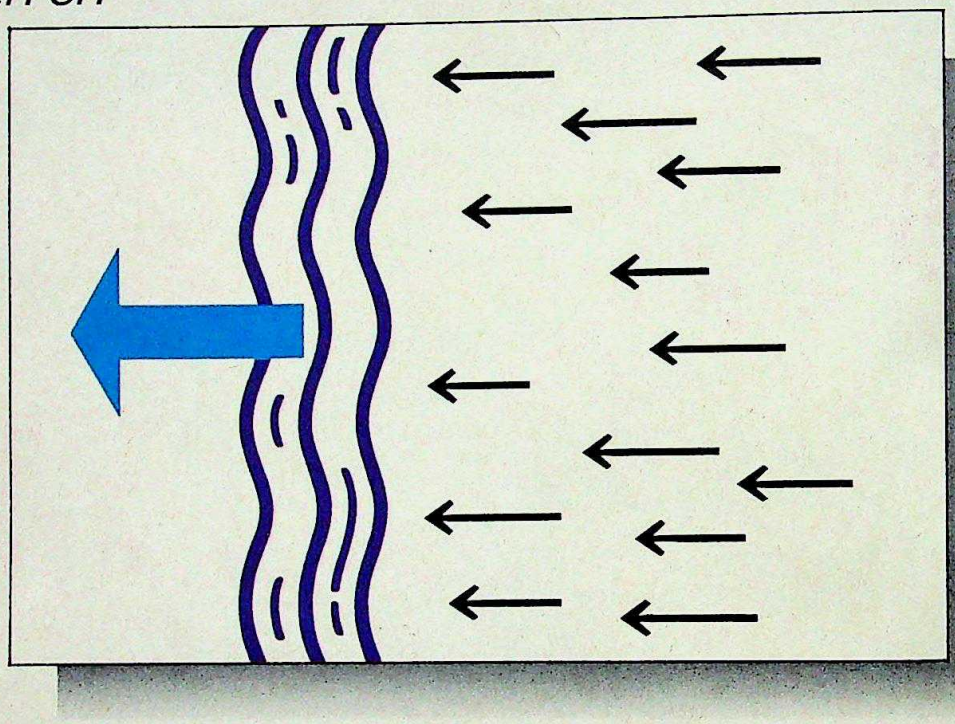

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Idle Worship

Sonia's birthday celebrated

CALPURNIA must also be felicitated, for Caesar is vain and prone to blandishments. That appears to have been the education of the Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (UPCC-I), for this year, in an outrageous move, it celebrated December 6—the birthday of Sonia Gandhi—as *Nari Vikas Parva* at the state level.

The bizarre move triggered off so much hilarity and controversy that the terribly embarrassed Congress(I) high command was forced to disown it *in toto*. The Prime Minister's Office told INDIA TODAY: "The celebrations in Lucknow were neither in consultation nor with the approval of this office." AICC(I) General Secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad too tried to be blase about the whole matter and play it down. Said he: "No one consulted me about the celebrations. It was a small thing which we have relegated to the past."

But the facts of the burlesque are that when Sonia reached Amethi on November 22 a delegation of the Uttar Pradesh Mahila Congress, led by Vidya Bajpeyi, informed her about the forthcoming birthday celebrations. Both Rajiv and Sonia actually stopped at a place in Amethi and had a look at the posters which talked of the birthday celebration as *Nari Divas*.

As it is, an official circular (number B1/3950) was issued by the state Congress(I) on behalf of its president, just a day before Rajiv reached Amethi, directing all city and district units of the party to celebrate Sonia's 42nd birthday as *Nari Vikas Parva*. The UPCC(I) President Balram Singh Yadav told his men he had got the go ahead from Ghulam Nabi Azad in the second week of November. And he proceeded to go overboard.

Yadav's circular in Hindi said: "In order to ensure the welfare of women and help them in becoming independent and to create awareness amongst them, the district and city Congress(I) committees should organise *Nari Vikas Parva* on December 6 and send detailed reports in this regard to the UPCC(I)." The circular also stated that a function had been organised by the state party unit to mark Sonia's birthday in Lucknow.

At the glittering, well-attended function in Lucknow Sonia was described variously as "Kasturba Gandhi's rightful heir" and "*Bharat ki mehatvapurna bahu*" (India's important daughter-in-law). Nor was prose considered sufficient to portray all of Sonia's qualities. Her virtues were also extolled through songs, ghazals and poems.

Observers feel all this indicated Rae Bareli will soon receive the same attention lavished on Amethi. But after his Amethi tour, Rajiv had denied rumours that his wife would seek election to the Lok Sabha, declaring categorically: "She has no political ambitions and will not contest any elections."

But there is a significance in the way her birthday celebrations were held that demands to be noted. It is difficult to dismiss it all as merely a manifestation of regional sycophantic fervour.

Grovellingly sycophantic, of course, it was. Yadav keeled over completely. He lit a lamp in front of a photograph of Sonia and in his speech kept referring to her as the "*desh ke mahan neta ki mahan patni*" (the great wife of the great leader of the country). Then a function was held in the afternoon in which three cabinet ministers—Saidul Hasan, Ammar Rizvi and Shyam Sunder Upadhyay—were the main speakers. Others made flowery speeches praising Sonia's efforts at uplifting womenfolk. One enthusiast at the celebrations was Bhaskar Pandey, a former Congress MLA, who was denied permission by the AICC(I) last year to hold similar celebrations. Declared Pandey wildly: "Sonia's 42nd birthday will bring about a revolution like the one in 1942."

Other small organisations joined the sycophantic spree. The Akhil Bharatiya Indira Vichar Manch celebrated the day as *Mahila Shakti Divas*; the Ramayana Sansthan, a local cultural organisation, as *Sanskrit Divas*. However, the attendance at the functions scarcely reflected the enthusiasm of the organisers. For example, at the Vichar Manch meeting the turn-out was a mere 20-25 people.

In the event that turned out to be hardly the worry—as the move boomeranged and adverse publicity brought acute embarrassment. And, typically, while the high command ducked, those responsible for the buffoonery were let off with mild reprimands. The *piece de resistance* of the entire slapstick was that Sonia's birthday turned out not to be on December 6 at all, but on December 9.

—DILIP AWASTHI

photographs by R.K. GUPTA

(Right) Yadav lights candles; and a priest offers prayers for Sonia

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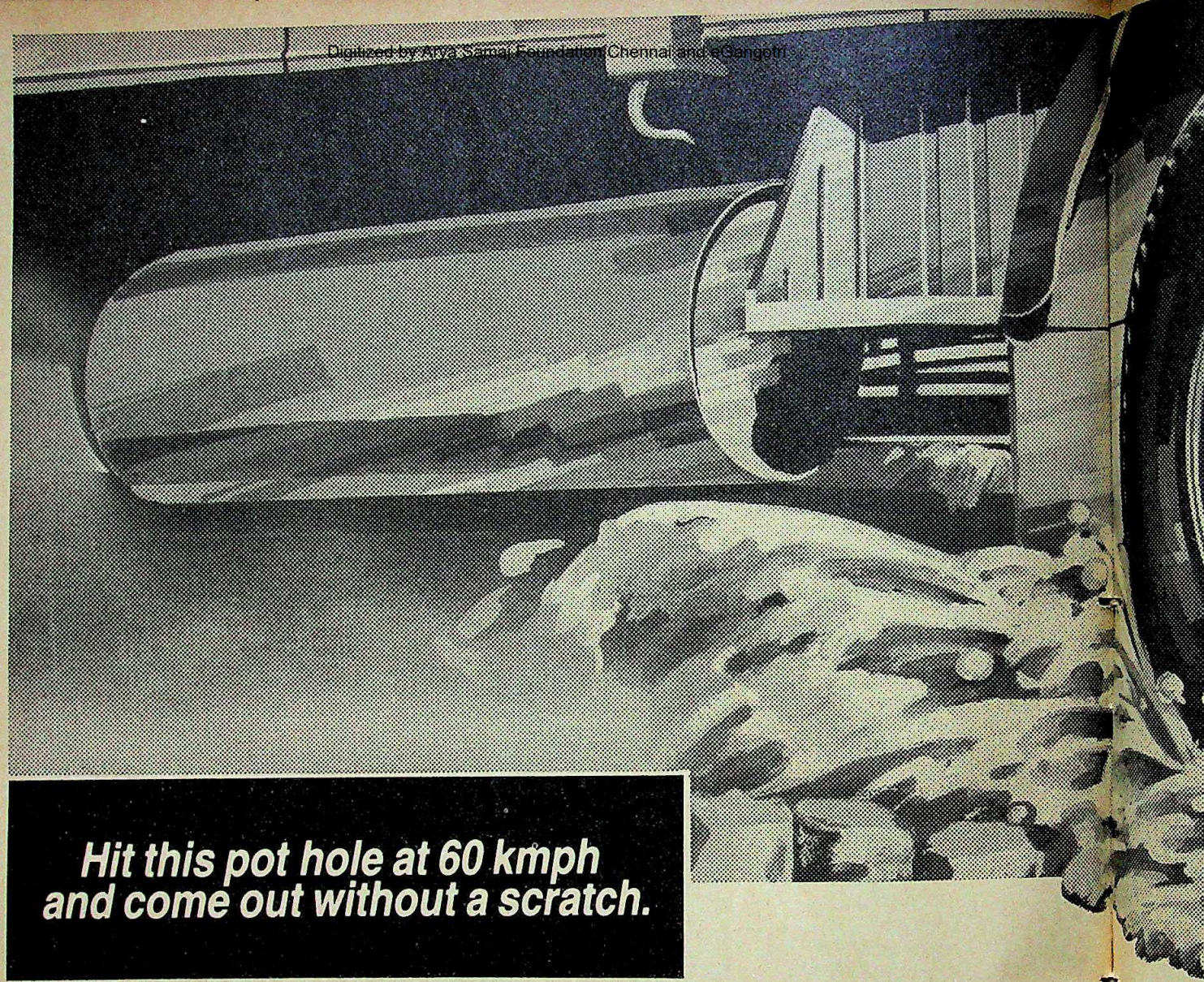

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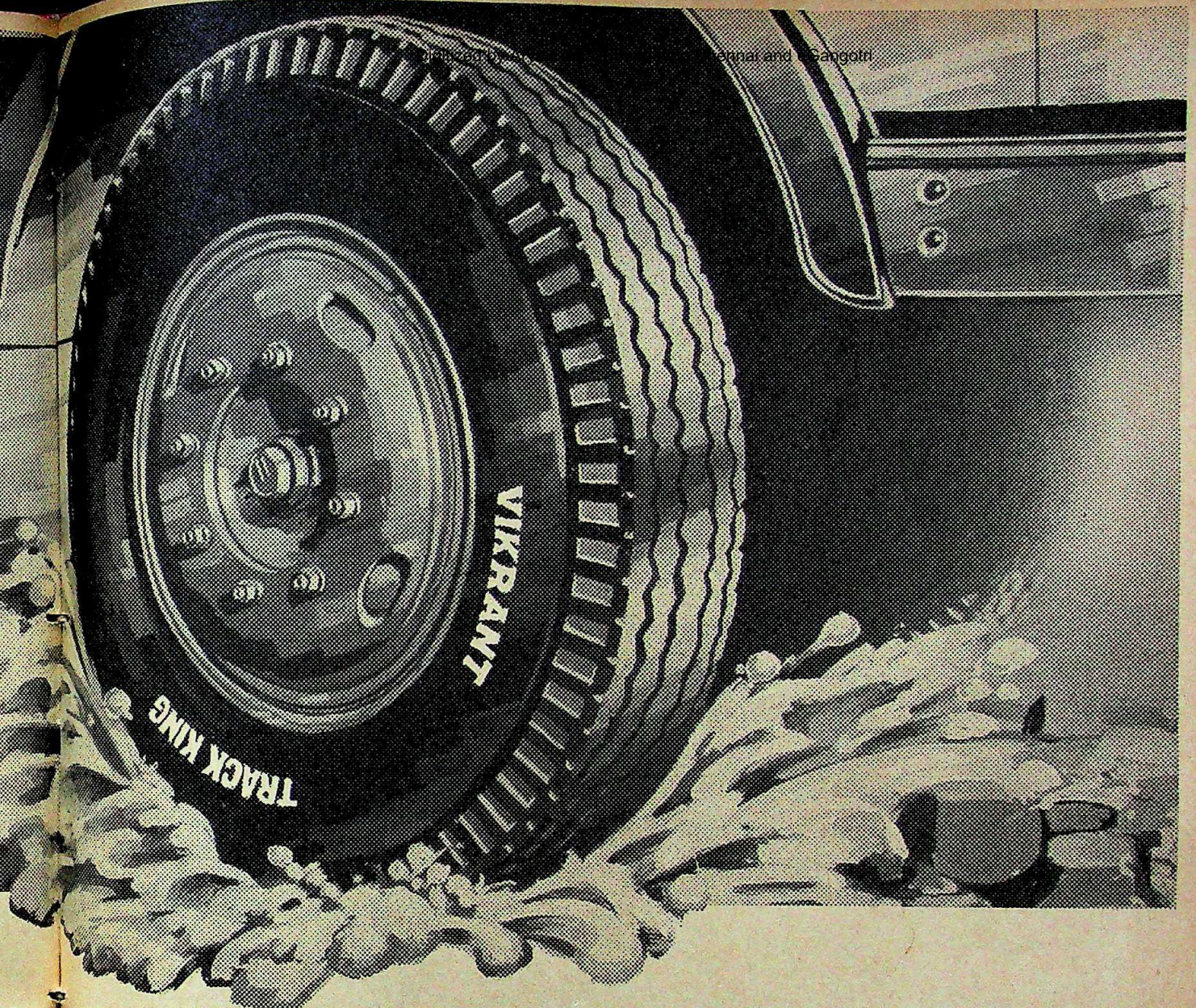

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KARNATAKA

New Charges

Allegations undermine Hegde

IN the internecine battle in the Janata Party in Karnataka, two rival factions have begun casting stones on each others' glass houses with devastating effect. The lairds of the glass houses: former chief minister R.K. Hegde and dissident leader H.D. Deve Gowda. Thanks to this the people have begun to see proof of what everyone suspected—rampant corruption at high levels.

The latest charge against Hegde was levelled by the hitherto unknown Janapara Horata Samanwya Samiti (pro-people agitation coordination committee). Meticulously researched documents released to the press revealed how in 1984-85 the Hegde government helped powerful people, including cine star Vishnuvardhan and well known builder C.V.L. Sastri, to convert 67 acres of land near Mysore into commercial property.

The property developers then sought exemption from the Urban Vacant Land Ceiling Act (UVLCA) pleading financial problems and sold the land to two firms owned by liquor giant Khodays at a shockingly undervalued price. According to the documents, dividend warrants of Khodays Distillery Industry were given to five members of Hegde's family.

The scandal would have attracted scant attention but for the manner in which it was highlighted last fortnight. The papers given by the Janapara Samiti, which claims to be a non-political public interest body of students, included applications for conversion of the land and exemption under the UVLCA. There were also ministerial notings, objections to the deal by a joint secretary of the Housing and Urban Development Department and directions from Hegde that the application be "considered sympathetically". The papers left no doubt about the dubious nature of the deals between November 1984 and March 1985, a period covering the general elections and state assembly polls.

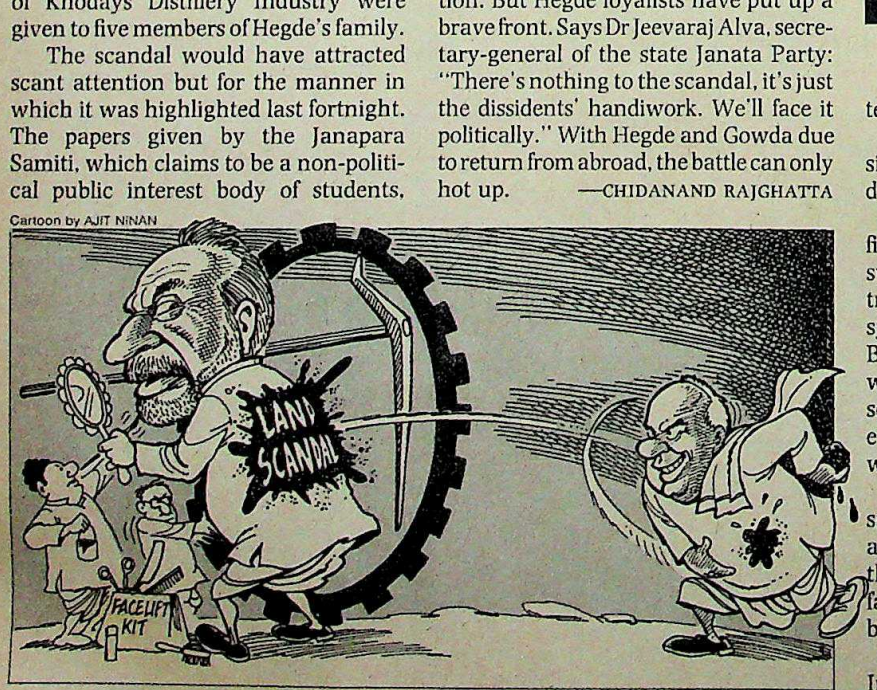
But the sensational information was hardly surprising. The Gowda faction had been hinting that they had "material" that could shatter Hegde's lily-white image. Within days of the revelations, the dissidents were boasting of having destroyed Hegde and even volunteered to "supply more dynamite". Said M.S. Narayan Rao, a dissident MLA: "The documents don't surprise us. In fact, its publication has been long delayed. There are many such scandals."

The dissidents' move comes in response to charges of corruption against Deve Gowda last year. Hegde had referred the charges to the Lok Ayukta and the corps of detectives this year. Though they found no evidence a prima facie case was established on a solitary charge: of Gowda having used his ministerial influence to get his sister-in-law a plot of land in Mysore city.

For Hegde the scandal couldn't have come at a worse time. Fighting to establish himself in the Opposition hierarchy in Delhi, this could undermine his position. But Hegde loyalists have put up a brave front. Says Dr Jeevaraj Alva, secretary-general of the state Janata Party: "There's nothing to the scandal, it's just the dissidents' handiwork. We'll face it politically." With Hegde and Gowda due to return from abroad, the battle can only hot up.

—CHIDANAND RAJGHATTA

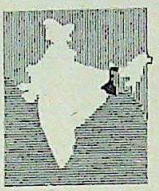
Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



WEST BENGAL

Fish Phobia

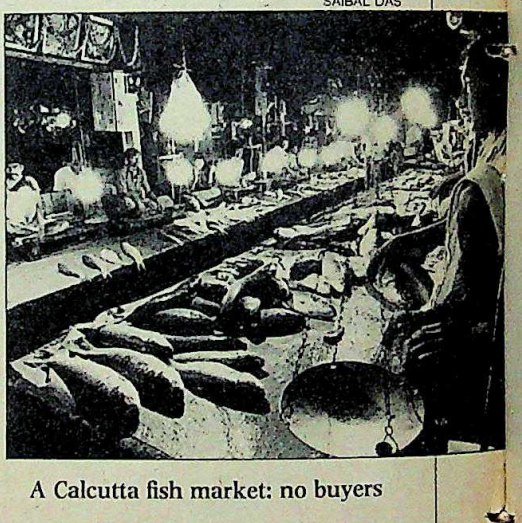
Epidemic spreads scare



MACCHE Bhate Bangali—fish and rice symbolise the quintessential Bengali, so goes the saying. An integral part of the diet, tradition and culture, most things in a Bengali's life converge happily on fish.

But today, Bengalis and their fish-loving brethren in Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya face a vexing question. In a torturous reversal of the situation, they have suddenly begun to suffer from a fear of fish, which newspapers are terming as "pisci-phobia".

SAIBAL DAS



A Calcutta fish market: no buyers

The reason is reports on radio, television and the newspapers warning of dangers of eating virus-infected fish.

The north-eastern states were the first to be affected. An epidemic that swept the states and claimed 40 lives was traced to fish with the ulcerative disease syndrome. The panic spread to West Bengal as the outbreak of the fish disease was reported there. The state fisheries secretary Sujit Bannerjee says the disease was brought to the state by flood waters from Bangladesh.

The epidemic has killed several thousand fish and threatens to cripple fishing activities in these states. Consumption of the fish leads to serious and sometimes fatal gastro-enteric problems in human beings.

According to scientists at the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute,

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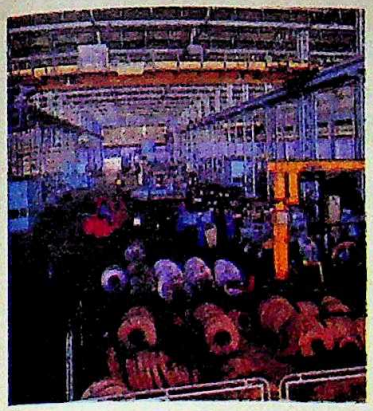
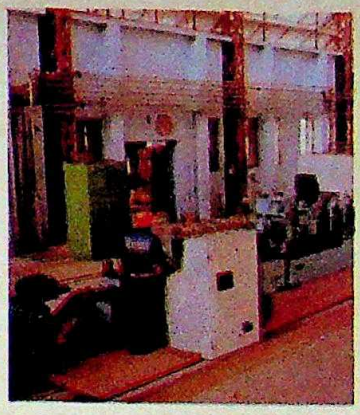
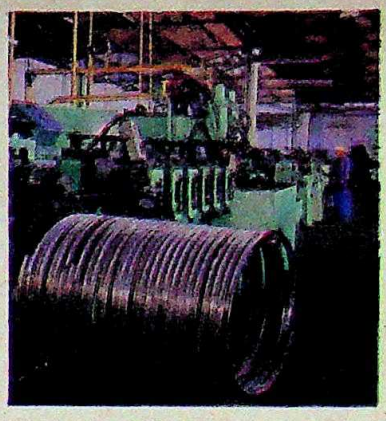

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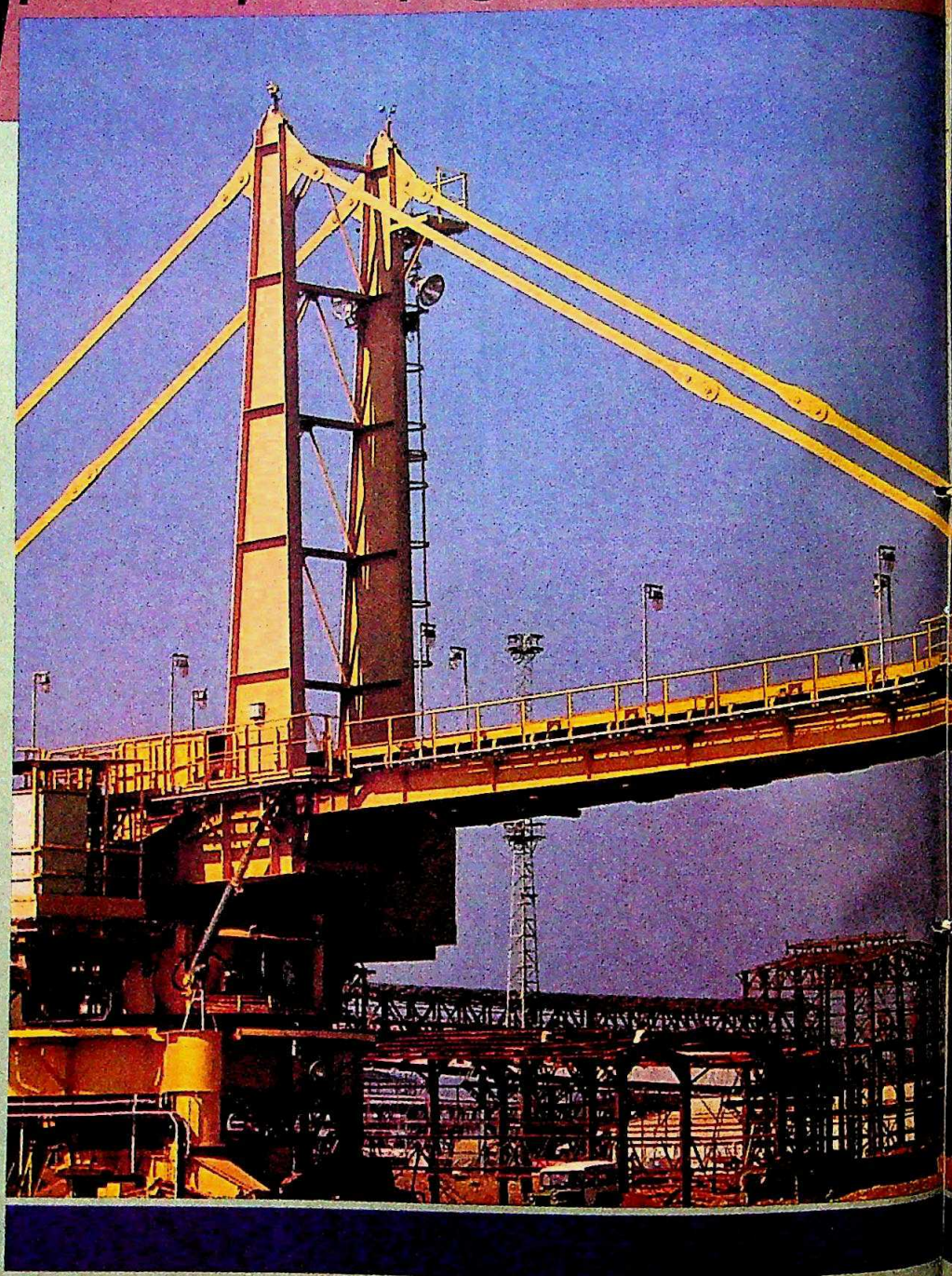

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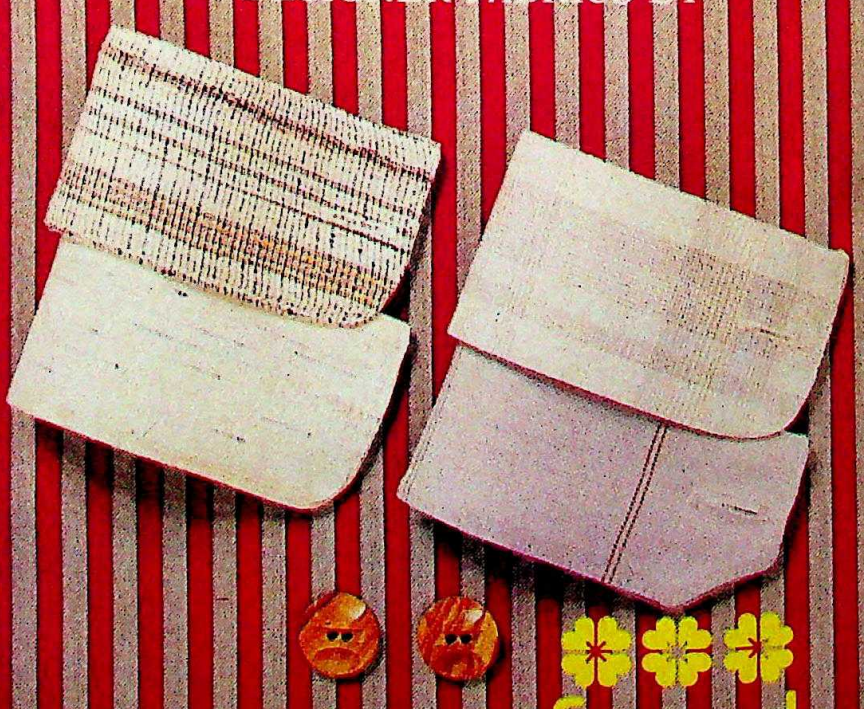

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Barrackpore, rotten carcasses of cattle that perished in the cyclone that lashed coastal areas of Bangladesh and West Bengal last fortnight contaminated the rivers.

Though no death has been reported in West Bengal, the alarmed public is scared of eating fish. Newspapers have quoted Calcutta Municipal Corporation officials urging the people not to eat or buy fish with "red ulcer marks or circles" on the body. Disease-prone fish have been identified as Rui, Katla, Mrigel, Maghur, Singh, Tangra and Hilsa, and panchayats instructed to conduct a drive to stop sale of contaminated fish. They have, however, said there is no cause for panic.

Fish hawkers were badly hit by the campaign as sales plummeted and rates touched an all-time low. Says M.D. Ansari, who sells fish in the busy Sealdah market: "My sales fell by 70 per cent." Though West Bengal did not ban the sale of fish, Assam did. Says Prabir Majumdar, who recently attended a wedding in Guwahati: "My uncle bought the fish for the wedding all the way from Katihar."

Apprehensive that the epidemic might threaten fishing activity in West Bengal, the state Government has requested the Centre to send a team of experts to detect the cause of the ulcerative disease syndrome. An amount of Rs 13.5 lakh has been sanctioned for application of lime and common salt in fish rearing and catchment areas to check the spread of the infection.

Says a scientist: "The virus itself is not pathogenic to human beings. The ulcerative condition of the fish attracts bacteria which leads to gastro-intestinal problems." Scientists now plan to characterise the virus, a procedure in which researchers will put the creature under an electron microscope, study its structure and find ways to deactivate it. They believe the current epidemic is an extension of the world's biggest recorded epidemic of fish disease in Thailand between 1983 and 1985.

While a majority of the fish-loving community has curbed its desire to have fish, fish and more fish, a few are making the most of the price crash. Says celebrated author Sunil Gangopadhaya, who buys fish everyday: "Every Bengali can tell a healthy fish from a diseased one." Fish is *jaler ujjwal sharshyo* (the bright crop of water), adds he, and no Bengali will let the absence of fish darken his life.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN

MAHARASHTRA

Concert Blues

PRIDE accused of violations

IT was a rock show that set Bombay dancing to the power and ecstasy of heavy metal music. The Swedish rock group Europe kicked off its world tour with a spectacular show which had two other groups—Nazareth and the Indian band Rock Machine. But soon after the group had left for Japan and Taiwan, the organisers, PRIDE India (Planning Rural-Urban Integrated Development through Education) had to face the music.

Enforcement officials raided the residence of Vipula Kadri, the honorary general secretary of PRIDE India, and charged her with FERA violations. According to the charges, Kadri had made a part of the $3,48,770 (Rs 48,82,780) payment to Europe without the permission of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), a fact which Kadri has admitted in court.

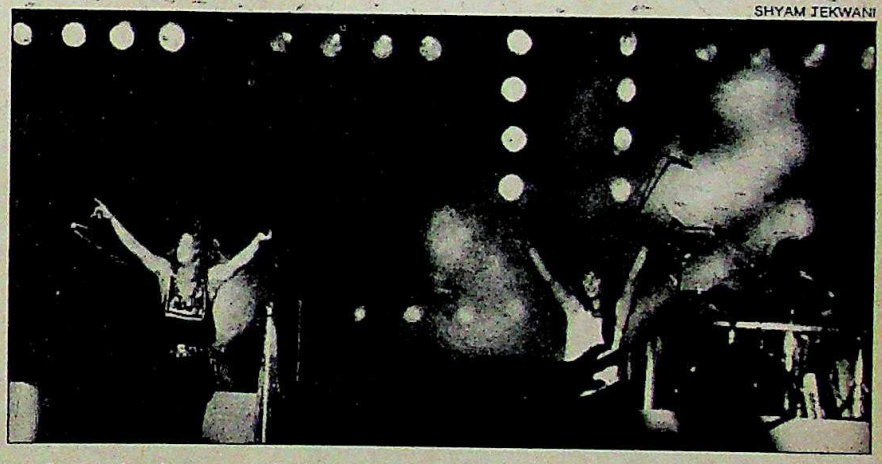
The RBI had allowed PRIDE India to pay $1,71,000 (Rs 23,94,000) for equipment and technicians. Kadri had apparently decided that the rest of the bill would be paid through foreign companies which would accept Indian currency. The New York-based Asian Projects Inc. and their Bangalore-based agents Vistas, were allegedly used for paying the bill in foreign currency. The $7,500 (Rs 1,05,000) bill for Nazareth— Rock Machine performed free—was allegedly paid through the London-based impressario Vikram Singh who had brought groups like Bootleg Beatles and Uriah Heep to India.

As part of her efforts to raise funds for PRIDE India, Kadri had earlier organised fashion shows in Canada and the USA. Says R.V. Pandit, publishing magnate and chairman of the steering committee of PRIDE India: "In a letter to the RBI, Kadri had said that she had raised half a million dollars through various functions in the US. If she has actually done what she says, it's a streak of madness. What does she stand to gain from it?"

For a reputed social service organisation like PRIDE India, the scandal was a shock. The body which initially started with an outlay of Rs 30,000 now has Rs 36 lakh. Its projects are mostly centred around 110 villages in Maharashtra. "With finances from the concert we hoped to move into other areas," says Samuel Nazareth, assistant director for rural uplift of PRIDE India.

But everything seemed to have gone wrong with the arrangements. The organisers realised late in the day that most of the tickets sold were counterfeit. The result: PRIDE India got only Rs 36 lakh out of the expected Rs 1 crore.

SHYAM TEKWANI



PRIDE charity concert: illegal foreign payments

The concert was also partly sponsored by *The Times of India* as part of its 150th year celebrations. The *Times* had given Rs 20 lakh worth of free publicity through its pages, and also advanced an interest-free loan of Rs 30 lakh to PRIDE India, refundable irrespective of the profit or loss of the concert. Rs 20 lakh has already been returned. According to the group they had nothing to do with the financial arrangements.

And in spite of the scandal which has raised a lot of questions about the financial management of the organisation, officials of PRIDE India are confident that they will come out of the shroud of shame.

—ARUN KATIYAR

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MADHYA PRADESH

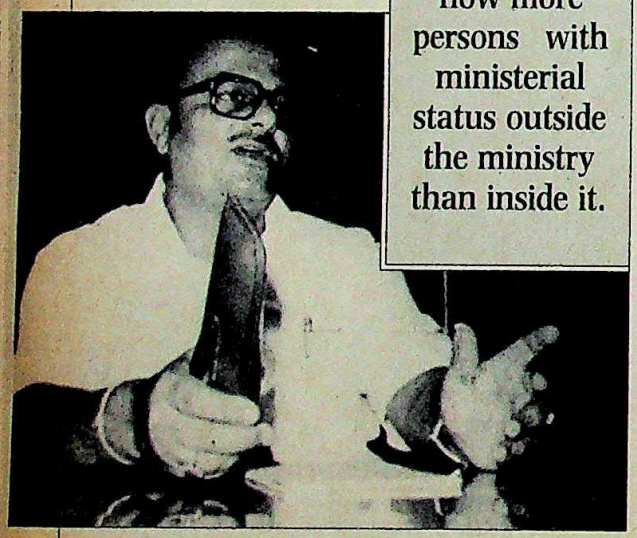
Party Favours

Arjun Singh doles out largesse

MADHYA Pradesh Chief Minister Arjun Singh is doing what he does best—distributing largesse to favourites and draining the state exchequer for narrow selfish political interests.

Last fortnight, in an ill-concealed attempt to reward loyalists, keep fence-sitters happy and buy peace with the dissidents, Singh chose 31 of his partymen to head various state corporations, public undertakings, boards and co-operatives. Moreover, 22 favourites have been bestowed 'ministerial status'.

Thanks to Arjun Singh's generosity, there are now more persons with ministerial status outside the ministry than inside it.



As a consequence, there are now more persons with ministerial status outside the ministry than inside it. The total strength of the ministry is 27; the number of persons enjoying ministerial status outside is now 38.

The chief minister has done this with little concern for the health of the state exchequer or the corporations, most of which are in the red. Each non-official chairman, on an average, costs the exchequer Rs 3 lakh per year.

The practice of appointing non-officials to manage the corporations—a practice started by Singh during his previous tenure—has proved disastrous. The political appointees are callous and hence the functioning of these bodies has deteriorated, losses have mounted and charges of corruption have been galore.

Corporation chairmen get a monthly salary of Rs 1,250, TA, DA, a car, personal staff, free residence and medical facilities, air travel, four-star hotel stay during tours, Rs 12,000 for furnishing their residence and 200 litres of free petrol every month. But even these liberal facilities are inadequate for some. The chief of one corporation spent Rs 61,737 on furnishing his residence. Another spent Rs 64,359.

The expenditure is an unnecessary burden on smaller corporations which can ill-afford it. For example the Panchayati Raj Corporation, saddled with a chairman of the rank of minister of state, has less than a dozen employees—three of them peons. The corporation, incorporated in 1981, is yet to take up a single programme, according to the latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. The Rural Housing Corporation is so small that it has to do with a part-time managing director. Yet it has to support a chairman of cabinet rank and a vice-chairman of the rank of deputy minister.

The chief minister grand scheme, under which every third Congressman member has got ministerial rank or a lucrative assignment in co-operatives and boards, is part of a larger game plan aimed at corralling political support and bringing dissidents into line. While the loyalists are happy with plum postings, the dissidents are in disarray. By including just four dissidents in the list of 31 appointees, Singh has created the illusion of a conciliatory hand. But in all, barely one-fourth of the chairmen and vice-chairmen are now from the rival camp.

The supporters of Motilal Vora and Madhavrao Scindia are unhappy. But a refusal to accept office can be interpreted as snubbing Singh's largesse. For many Congressmen in the state, dissident or loyalist, it's in any case an offer they would rather not refuse.

—N.K. SINGH

BABRI MASJID

Splitting Heirs

Jockeying for leadership

THE volatile Babri Masjid issue may wear a religious cloak, but the garb underneath has been exposed as nothing more than a battle for leadership of the Muslim community.

This was made obvious by the vertical split last fortnight in the 10-member Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee. What came as a bigger surprise was that each group tried to make the other appear to be the hawks while toning down its own militant stand.

Differences within the Muslim leadership hinge on a personality clash and not the contentious issue of liberating the place of worship. This became evident when the group that walked out on the committee's Convenor and Janata Party MP, Syed Shahabuddin, had no new programme to offer. Both its demands that the 150 mosques listed as historic monuments be thrown open for prayers and all disputes over places of worship be resolved by reverting to their status at the time of Independence, were on the agenda of the pre-split committee.

The stage for the split was set at a meeting of the committee last month at Shahabuddin's Delhi residence. Adopting a surprisingly moderate posture to facilitate negotiations with the Home Ministry, Shahabuddin had postponed the date of his proposed march to Ayodhya to 'liberate the mosque'. This had drawn flak from leaders of the Uttar Pradesh unit of the committee. Tempers rose to such a pitch that Shahabuddin called the state leaders "extremists" and asked them to leave his house.

The humiliated leaders, already wary of Shahabuddin emerging as the lone voice of the Muslims, hurriedly convened a special convention, roping in Abdullah Bukhari, the Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid. Bukhari's son, Ahmed Bukhari, who heads the militant Adam Sena, played a major role at the meeting. Five leaders of the coordination committee were present: Zaffaryab Jilani, Azam Khan and Muzaffar Husain Kachauchvi from Uttar Pradesh, Salahuddin Owaisi, Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen leader and MP from Hyderabad and Abdullah Bukhari.

They announced the formation of a

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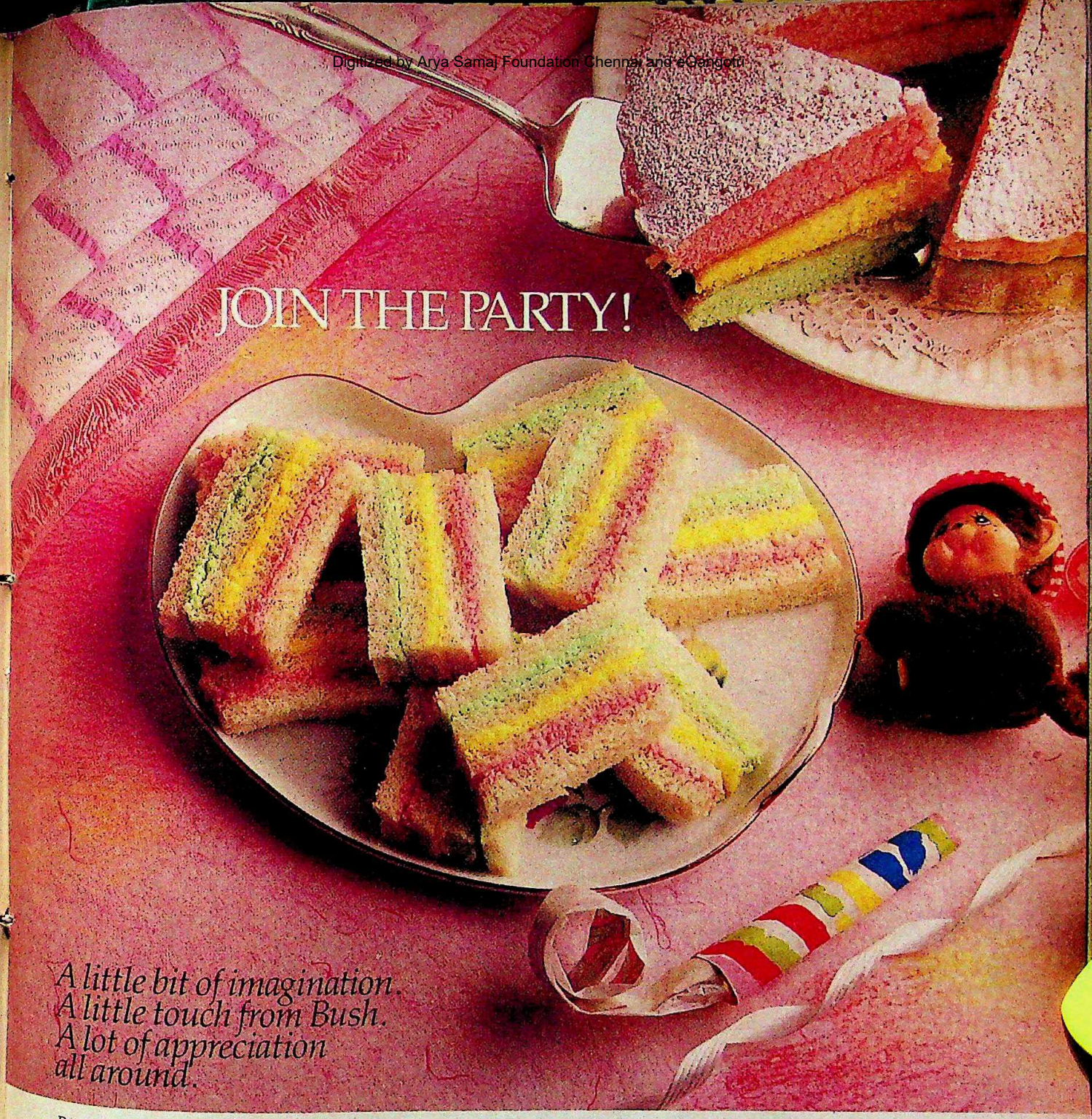

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Put the party colours on the table.
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the essence of almonds,
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the taste of pistachios.
Bush makes a simple sponge cake
thrice as nice.
And adds the magic of a rainbow
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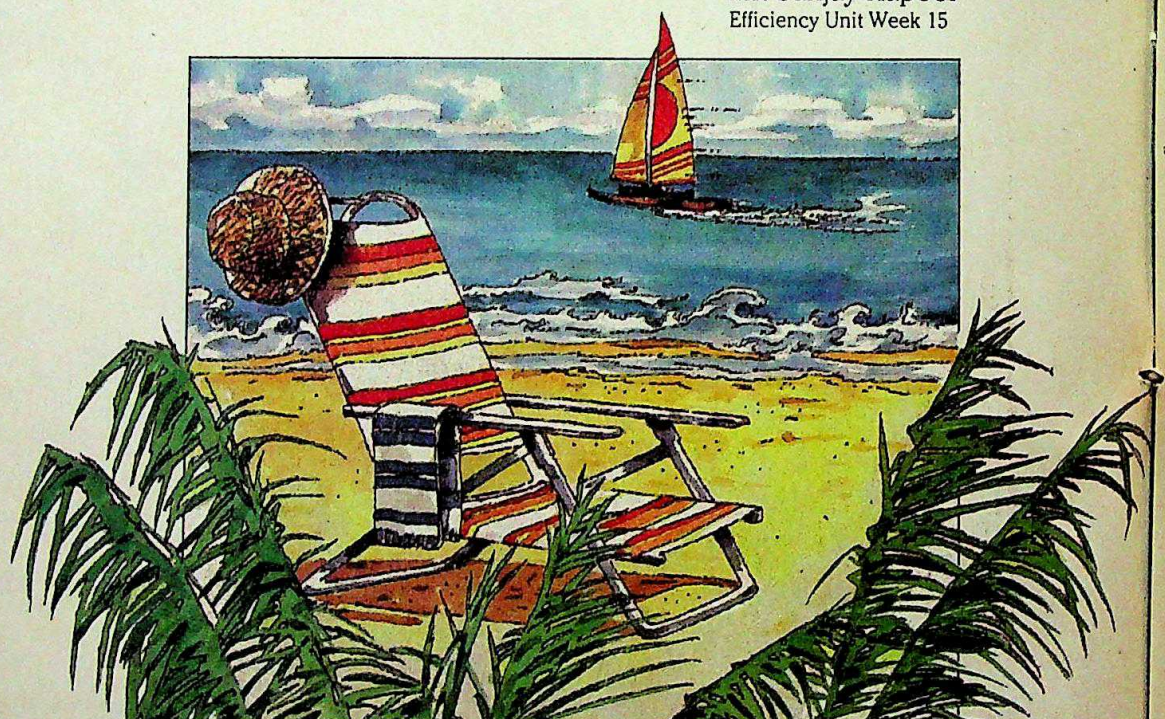
Vacation Ownership at The Old Anchor, Goa.

"For the cost of just 4 holidays, I'll be enjoying luxury vacations forever!"

Owner :
Mr. Sanjay Kapoor
Efficiency Unit Week 15



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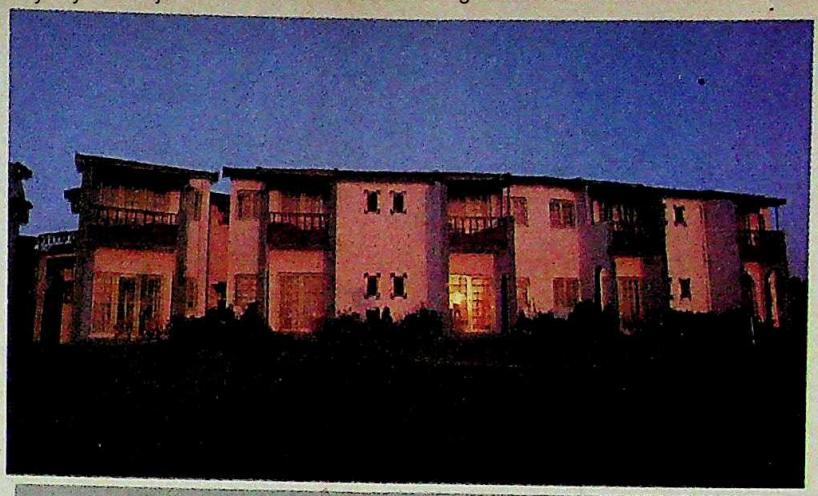


"Vacation Ownership works on a simple principle.

I have become the owner of a Vacation UnitWeek to enjoy luxury vacations year after year.

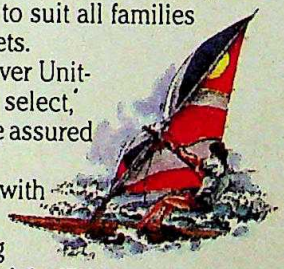
This simply entailed a one-time payment. And a service fee whenever I occupy the Unit.

Maintenance will be taken care of from the returns on the maintenance contribution I'll pay only once. And from the annual maintenance fee I will pay whenever required."

The Old Anchor : Your luxury resort in the sun

Dalmia Resorts present The Old Anchor, Goa.

A luxury Vacation Ownership resort that offers accommodation units to suit all families and budgets.



Whichever UnitWeek you select, you can be assured of luxury vacations with a host of enthralling recreational facilities.

Because we believe, every vacation should be simply unforgettable.

Costs : As attractive as the holidays

There are 3 types of units to choose from, and 3 kinds of seasons.

	HIGH (Rs.)	MEDIUM (Rs.)	LOW (Rs.)
2-BEDROOM	28,500	24,500	22,500
1-BEDROOM	22,500	20,000	17,500
EFFICIENCY	18,500	16,000	13,500

Let us take the example of an Efficiency Unit in the Medium Season, as it is the best comparison possible with a 5-star hotel room at an average price.

In just four years, your total cost including annual service fee as well as Expenditure Tax will be less than your total cost in a 5-star hotel.

This means, from the fifth year onwards, your holidays will be at only a part of the cost of a 5-star hotel.

Depending upon the unit type and season you actually choose, your savings could commence earlier (3 years) or later (5 years).

And every year, the savings will increase.

A different location every year

The second Dalmia Resort, Misty Meadows, Pahalgam, is slated to open in 1989. (Subject to weather conditions).

And plans are underway to promote many more resorts all across the country.

This means, through our Exchange Program, you can enjoy a different location every year.

Infact, The Old Anchor is also affiliated to RCI® — Resort Condominiums International (subject to RBI approval). So, through the International Exchange Program, you can even exchange your UnitWeek for any of the over 1500 RCI® resorts around the world.

Domestic and International Exchanges are, ofcourse, subject to availability and relevant fees.

The more you discover about Dalmia Resorts, the more difficult it will be to answer one basic question.

What is more exciting : The purchase opportunity. Or the vacations that are to follow!

DALMIA RESORTS International

DALMIA RESORTS INTERNATIONAL PVT. LTD.

CORPORATE OFFICE : 1st Floor, Devika Tower, 6, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110 019. Tel : 6441554, 6445971, 6414113. Telex : 031-71095 DRI IN. **SALES OFFICES : New Delhi :** Tel : 3313933, 3310449. **Bombay :** Tel : 2042855, 2042637, 2872413. **Calcutta :** Tel : 433618. **Madras :** Tel : 476284. **Bangalore :** Tel : 564822. **Ahmedabad :** Tel : 400734. **Lucknow :** Tel : 47056.

For complete details, fill in this coupon and mail it back to us today, and find out for yourself how you can save on your vacation costs of tomorrow :

Name_____

Address_____

_____ Tel._____

Company's Name _____

Signature _____

IT

When you'd rather own your vacations.

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It's been raining all night. The water level has risen in Ramesh's field. If unchecked, it will destroy his whole crop! He shouts an urgent warning to Shekhar, the field officer from the irrigation project. In seconds, the message reaches Dharam, the engineer at the dam site. Instantly, Dharam barks out a terse order: "Open Gate No. 2!" The workers hasten to obey — the heavy gate lifts and the swollen river's angry spate is contained and curbed. At the dam site and all along the canal ways and junction points, other irrigation officers are closely in touch. They monitor and control the discharge of water into thirsty fields many kilometres away, where it will nourish rather than destroy crops.

Radio communication makes it possible. Bringing wireless contact to places no telephone would reach.

Every day, Meltron touches the lives of thousands of people like Ramesh, Shekhar and Dharam. Through communication technology. Technology based on electronics, that's on par with the world's best.

Meltron has been the torch-bearer of the electronics revolution in Maharashtra. A revolution that has snowballed and gathered momentum, with dozens of ancillary units springing up all over. Meltron has played a catalytic role in the process of change sparking off change. Because of its commitment to the development of technology in the service of the common man.

Meltron marches forward into tomorrow with the confidence of a leader. Working towards the goal of national unity through communication.

MELTRON

Maharashtra Electronics Corporation Limited

Bringing people closer through communication.

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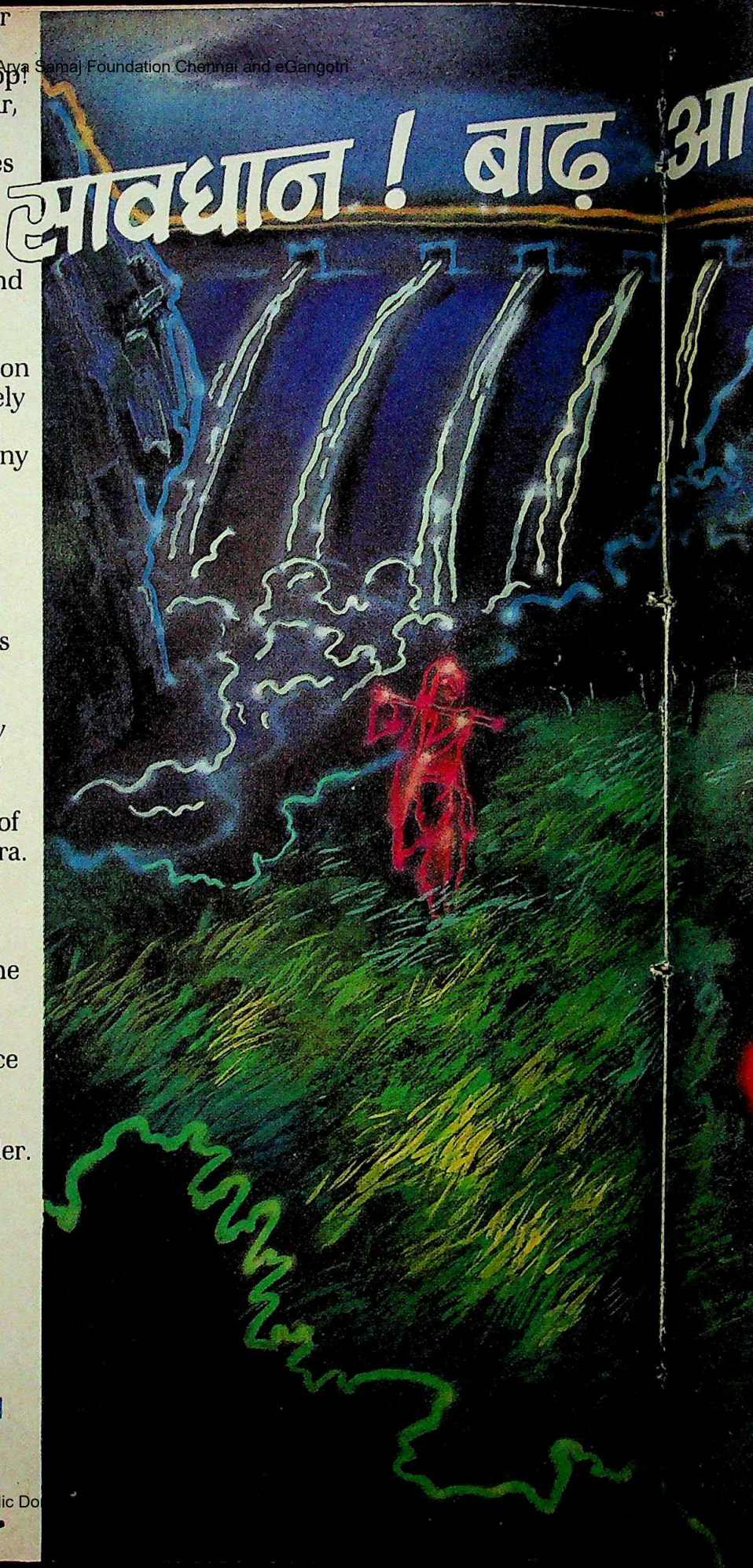

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Ramu's anxiety is reflected in his voice. His little boy lies weak and dehydrated from the food-poisoning that has affected almost half the village after the mela. The nearest Rural Health Centre is miles away. What can he do?

A cry for help goes out... and the doctor is galvanised into action. Life-giving medicines in hand, he arrives in time... to cure Ramu's son and the other villagers too.

Rural telephone exchanges make it possible. Linking village and village, village and town, village and city.

Every day, Meltron touches the lives of millions of people like Ramu. Through communication technology. Technology based on electronics, that's on par with the world's best.

Meltron has been the torch-bearer of the electronics revolution in Maharashtra. A revolution that has snowballed and gathered momentum, with dozens of ancillary units springing up all over. Meltron has played a catalytic role in the process of change sparking off change. Because of its commitment to the development of technology in the service of the common man.

Meltron marches forward into tomorrow with the confidence of a leader. Working towards the goal of national unity through communication.

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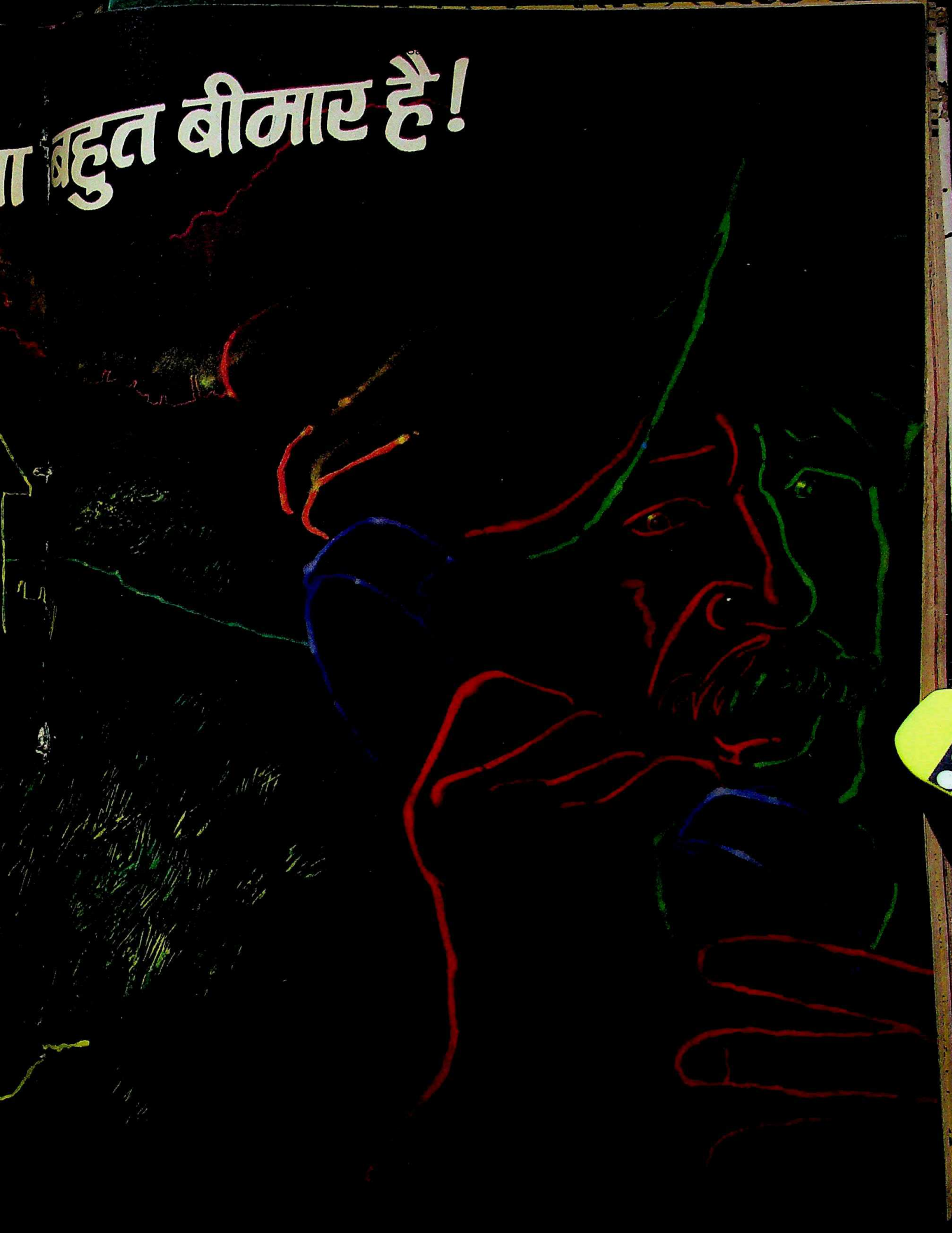
ा बहुत बीमार है!

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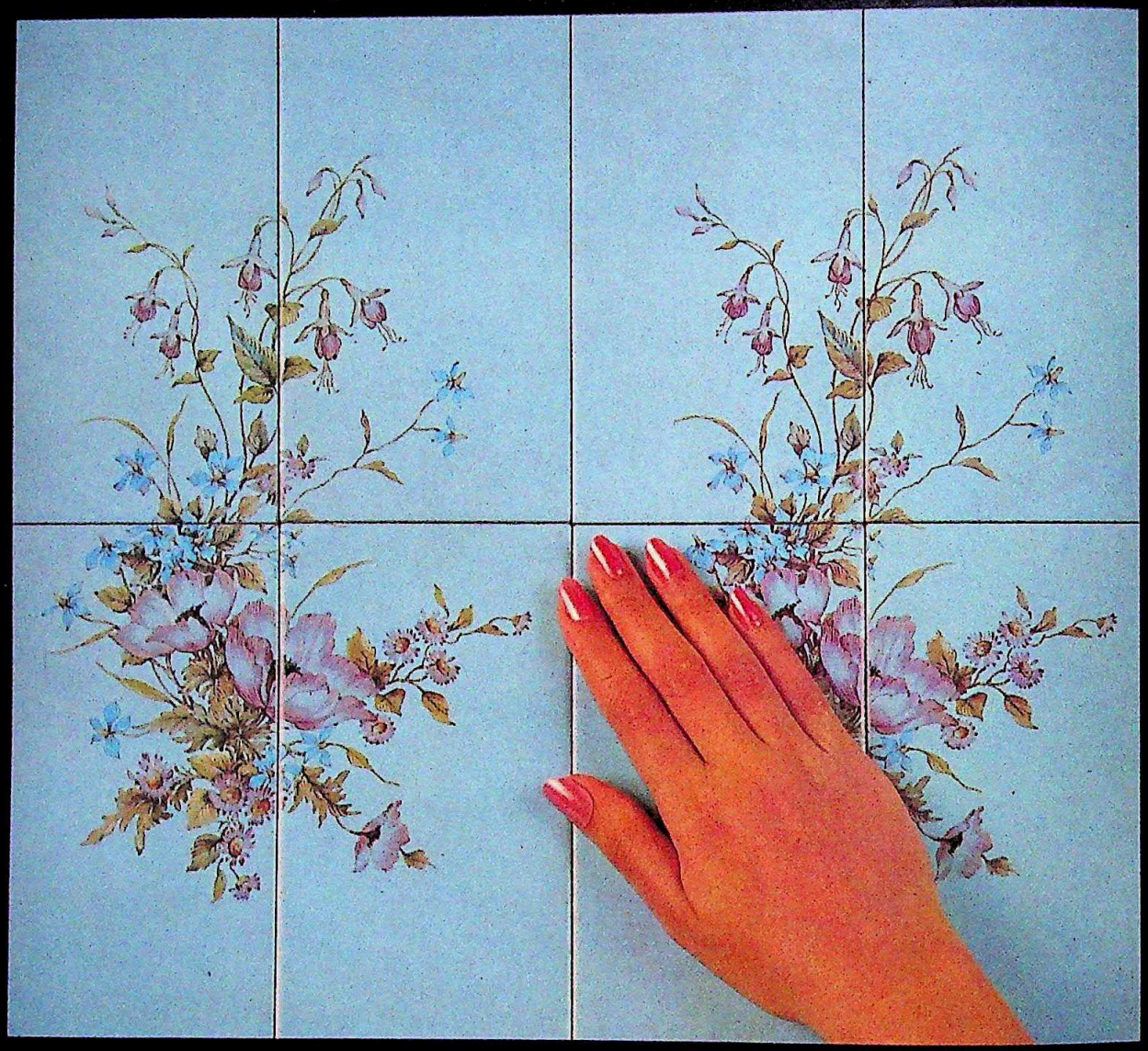

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new organisation, the All-India Babri Masjid Conference, and Shahabuddin expelled all five from his committee the next day.

The committee's formation was aimed at grabbing the mantle of Muslim leadership from Shahabuddin. Admitted Owaisi: "Our main differences hinged on the arrogant behaviour and the brinkmanship of Shahabuddin's functioning." Others too held that his "two steps forward, one step backward" stance on the Ayodhya march was causing concern among the movement's lower rungs. Debunking these charges, Shahabuddin termed the split an outcome of the "personal ambitions" of the splinter group leaders.

With the Muslim leaders divided, the Government can breathe easier. It may even throw up a surprise solution, the credit for which could be claimed by the Congress(I).

—PANKAJ PACHAURI

PRAMOD PUSHKARNA

Babri movement splinter leaders at their Delhi meet

BOTTOMLINE BY D. BUNKER

Clearance Sail

JUDGING by the current demand for character certificates penned by a foreign hand, it might soon turn into a flourishing cottage industry. One can imagine the advertisements going something like this. "Clearance Certificates For Sale. Place of Origin—London, Geneva, USA (all cities), Panama, Isle of Man, Milan, Sweden (Stockholm and Karlskoga; other branches opening soon). Suppliers of all types of certificates. Guaranteed genuine. Arms manufacturers, doctors (for extradition problems), detective agencies, undertakers, Swiss employers, frontmen (and women). Other categories organised on special payment."

The possibilities are literally mind-boggling—as is the clientele. Here are some potential ones.

Uttar Pradesh Congress(I) chief Balram Singh Yadav obtains a letter from Sonia's family lawyer in Milan confirming that her birthday is on December 6. Also produces a photostat copy of her birth certificate. An official spokesman, however, denies that Sonia's birthday is on that date but refuses to divulge the exact day "in the national interest".

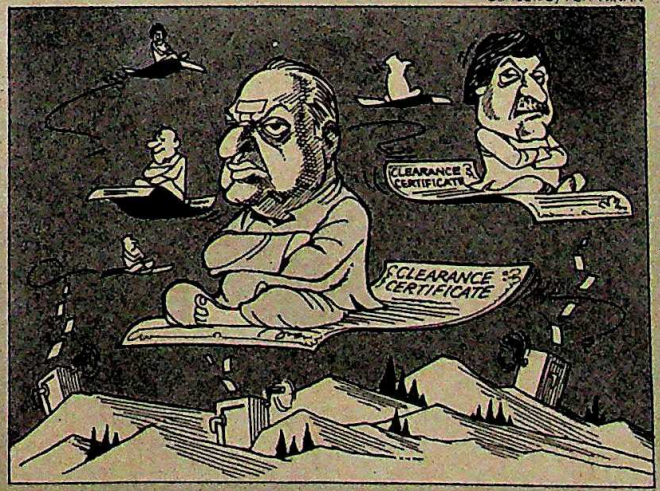
Satish Sharma releases a letter from his father-in-law in Brussels confirming that he did send him Italian tiles for a swimming pool as a gift. "They are very ordinary tiles. They are just like *desi* tiles. There's no difference," says the letter, adding, "the Indian press is making a lake out of a puddle. After all, most Indian Airline pilots have such necessities of life in their homes."

Lalit Suri produces a letter from the chairman of Sumitomo Corporation stating he was not paid a commission for the ONGC deal. He was, the letter says, paid "for some genuine work" done on behalf of the company and this is not be confused with commissions, kickbacks or winding up charges. "We always appoint people for 'genuine work' as opposed to work that is not genuine. The two are entirely different," the letter states.

N.T. Rama Rao, not one to be left out, holds a press conference where he releases a file of letters from some very confused bankers abroad. One sample: "To whom it may or may not concern. We have received a letter from a Mr N.T. Rama Rao who claims to be the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. He has asked us to issue a clearance certificate stating that he does not have any assets abroad. He says that he would like this since his life is an open book but he would like to make it an encyclopaedia. He has asked for a clearance certificate just in case anybody ever asks him for one. We gladly do so in the relief that he has had no dealings with us. Yours, etc."

The Hindujas release a letter to the Indian press signed on behalf of Pitco clearing them of any involvement in the Bofors payments. The letter, on Pitco letterhead with the address of the Hindujas' London headquarters, states: "Dear Gopi. It was lovely bumping into you at Maggie's dinner the other night. I was very distressed to hear about the false accusations levelled against you in the Indian press. I would like to place on record the fact that Pitco has never had any links with the Hindujas even though we share the same office building and much else. Looking forward to seeing you. Yours sincerely, Srichand."

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



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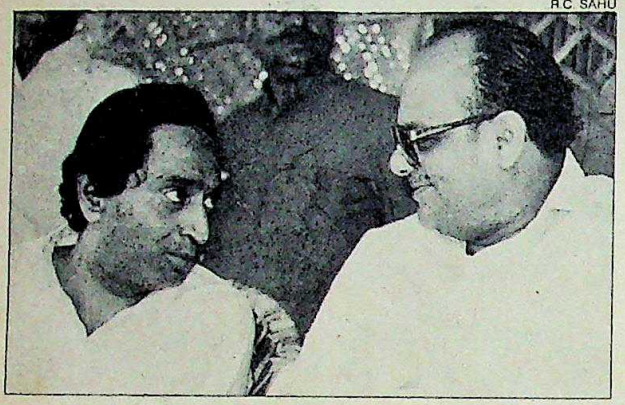
A Deep Game

WHOSE game is the high-profile MP from Chhindwara, Kamalnath, playing? Recently, he declared he intended contesting the next assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh. This amounted to his saying he planned to stake a claim to the chief ministership. It created a stir as Kamalnath is considered to be close to Chief Minister Arjun Singh. Asked why he wanted to shift from New Delhi's centre stage to the backwaters of state politics, he shot back: "Why not?"

R.C. SAHU



Kamalnath and Arjun Singh: changing loyalties

Kamalnath was one of the first Congressmen to openly criticise the Motilal Vora government. His actions finally led to Vora's exit and Singh's return. But of late, Kamalnath has been trying to patch up with the Vora-Scindia camp. He even said once he'd join the two Union ministers in their tours of the state, which are directed against Singh. Kamalnath's occasional outbursts are a warning to Singh that his support should not be taken for granted. And he has been able to extract his pound of flesh. Five out of 10 of his supporters among the state's legislators have been rewarded with ministerial posts or chairmanship of state corporations. By dropping names (especially of Rajiv Gandhi), he's been systematically carving out his own area of influence. But the dissidents are wary of Kamalnath. They feel he's trying to 'infiltrate' into their camp as an agent of Singh. Their suspicions aren't unfounded. Even in 1981, when he was described as an "extra-constitutional centre of power" in the state, he simultaneously tried to cultivate the friendship of V.C. Shukla and make Singh the chief minister.

A Golden Catch

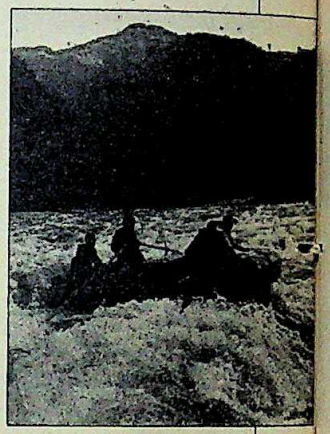
THE coast off Saurashtra and Kutch is proving a profitable hunting ground for the Indians. Last fortnight, the coast guard vessel, *Varun*, seized contraband gold worth Rs 26 crore by intercepting a Pakistani vessel, *Al Khalidi*, in the high seas off Jakhau port. M. Tanjea, the captain of *Varun*, and K.K. Jaiswal, commander of the Porbandar coast guard headquarters, have reason to be happy. This is the third gold seizure by *Varun* in the last five months. In August the haul was Rs 11 crore and a month later, Rs 5 crore. And the total value of gold seized by *Varun*, a staggering Rs 42 crore, is more than the cost of the vessel.

The latest seizure was replete with high drama. On December 2, it spotted *Khalidi* hovering in a suspicious manner. When signalled to stop, it sailed faster. *Varun* gave chase; the coast guard personnel opened fire and intercepted it. But as they came aboard the vessel, its occupants, eight Pakistani nationals, tried to resist. In the ensuing scuffle two smugglers were hurt. But the struggle was worth the trouble. Hidden in 70 jackets was a massive cache of gold biscuits. The injured were taken by helicopter to Porbandar and then to Jamnagar for treatment. The rest along with *Khalidi* were taken to Bombay and handed over to customs officials. The gold, it is believed, belonged to a Gulf-based Indian smugggler.

Formidable Challenge

SKIING won't be the only exhilarating sport in Jammu & Kashmir this winter. A group of professional river runners has taken on the challenge of the Chenab which remains unconquered despite the efforts of four earlier expeditions. Foaming through a virtual ravine, it's the most turbulent river in the state.

But the present team, a mix of US, West German and Indian oarsmen, is confident. With reason. Two years ago, expedition leader Ken Warren, 61, led a team down the Yangtse river in China, which he rates as "the toughest anywhere". Warren is not new to India either. He calls himself "the grandfather of river running in India", having introduced the sport in the country in 1976. One of his pupils, Shaukat Sikand, 27, of Markhor Adventures is an important member of the team which includes Warren's wife, Jan. The Rs 3-lakh venture is supported, among others, by the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Department. It hopes to chart a not-too-dangerous portion of the Chenab to attract river running enthusiasts. If it succeeds, river running, which is today confined to the upper Ganga, might become a regular feature in the rivers of Jammu.



River rafting: dangerously attractive

Shameful Assault

IS the CPI(M) any better than Rajiv Gandhi's Government in regard to press freedom? Many would answer with an emphatic no, at least after the gory incident when supporters of CITU, the trade union wing of the CPI(M), hacked to death Dibakar Mondal, an employee of the Siliguri-based *Uttar Banga Sambad*, on November 24. Mondal's fault: he was accompanying a van carrying the daily's edition for distribution. Since the beginning of last month, CITU workers had ensured that copies of the *Sambad* and *Himalchuli*, north Bengal's leading Bengali and Nepali morningers, were not distributed. With a combined circulation of over 78,000, both papers were running a series of investigative stories on the alleged corrupt practices of local Marxist MLAs. CITU dissuaded most hawkers from distributing them by promising higher rates of commission for distributing the CPI(M)'s newspapers.

Ironically, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu was in Siliguri when Mondal was killed. When the *Sambad's* employees went to meet him, he refused and flung Mondal's photograph stating he'd nothing to do with it. The result: journalists all over Bengal condemned the slaying. Left Front partners too censured it; the CPI urged the state Government to intervene and solve the crisis. In an unprecedented move, it has now taken over the responsibility of distribution of newspapers till December 20.

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The desolate ramparts of Jhansi remember the valiance of its young queen and a tragic grandeur in a moment of history.

बुन्देलों हरबोलों के मुंह हमने सुनी कहानी थी,
खूब लड़ी मर्दानी, वह तो झांसीवाली रानी थी।

'I shall not surrender my Jhansi'. And she did not. In her ceaseless battle with the British, the young queen Lakshmibai fought to the finish, but refused to submit. In her tragic end was her glory.

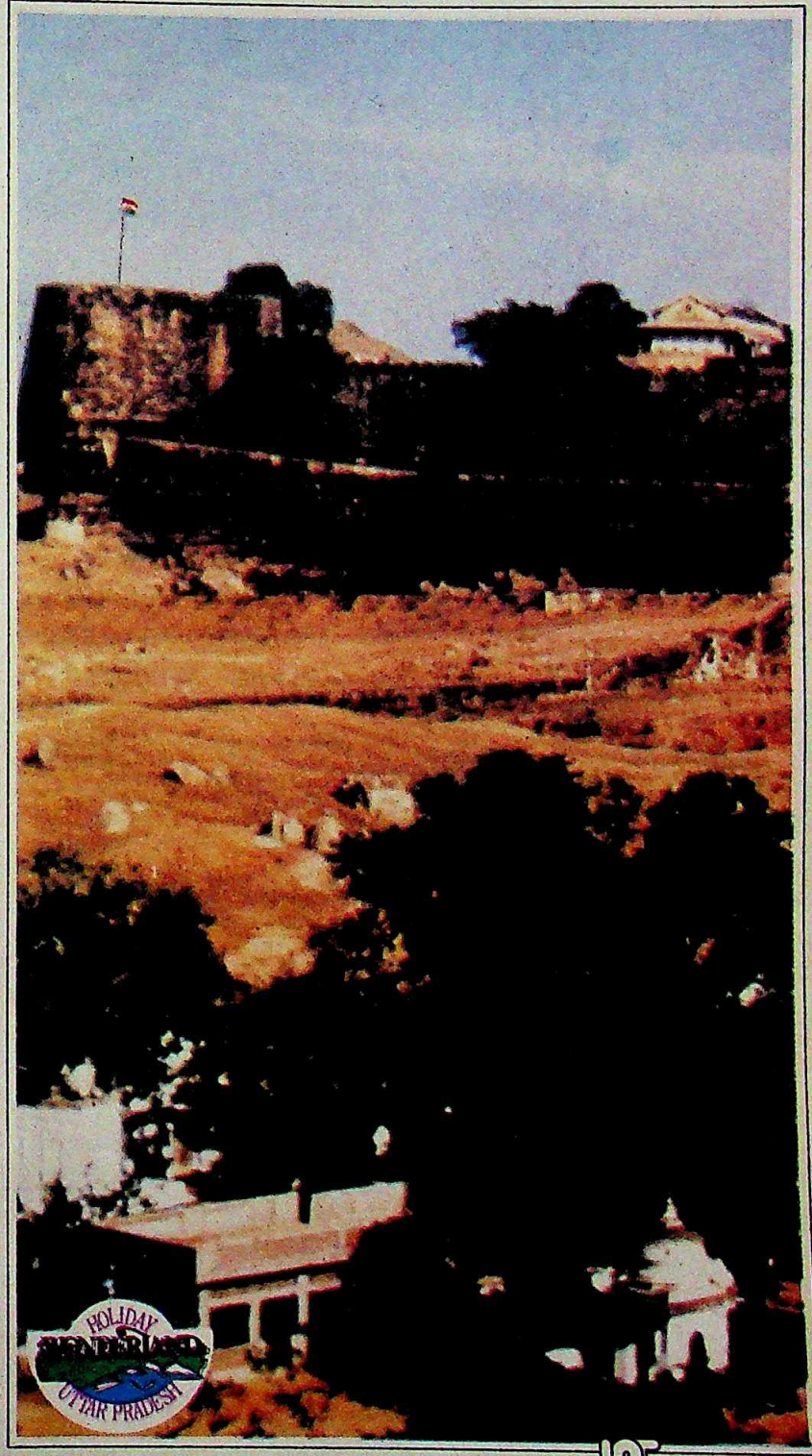
Uttar Pradesh evokes the memories of some of the most glorious moments in India's first war of independence.

Bithoor, a mute testimony to the valour of Peshwa Nana Saheb and Tatya Tope, remembering their triumphs and tragedies. Lucknow, where the Residency was sieged for forty-five days by the soldiers of the war of independence. Kanpur, a scene of battle and blood, fire and fury, where the British might fell to dust.

Many a time Uttar Pradesh has emerged from the mist of history and shone with a scintillating brilliance. Its cities and monuments are a witness. Agra, the city of Mughal splendour. Fatehpur Sikri, Emperor Akbar's deserted capital. Mahoba, the fabled land of the legendary warriors, Alha and Udal.

Accessibility : Lucknow, Agra, Varanasi and Kanpur have direct air connections with the major cities of India. All the places in Uttar Pradesh are linked with a network of rail and road. Inter-state buses and luxury coaches ply between important cities of Uttar Pradesh and other states.

Accommodation : All the destinations offer wide-ranging accommodation facilities—from luxury hotels to youth hostels, dharamshalas and pilgrim sheds. In addition, UP Tourism provides 129 well-appointed stay-points at various tourist centres.



An enduring memory of a glorious hour in history, the ramparts of the Jhansi Fort.

Uttar Pradesh. The spirit lives on.

UP

U.P. Tourism

'Chitrahar', 3 Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow 226 001.

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A RANGE OF FIVE DIFFERENT MEMORY GAMES FOR YOUR CHILD AGED 3 TO 8 YEARS.

FUNSKOOL

MEMORY GAMES

Funskool brings to India the internationally popular Memory Games, specially designed to help your children develop their memory skills.

Funskool's Memory Games build visual recall ... as well as object, colour and shape recognition. They encourage your child to think, while providing hours of absorbing enjoyment. Besides, these games are so simple, they require no parental supervision.

And that's not all. Memory Games come in a range of 5 different and exciting sets and are designed to grow with your child.

For ages 3 - 6:
- The Original Memory
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- Animal Families Memory

For ages 5 - 8:
- Step by Step Memory
- Match and Move Memory

So bring home Memory Games. And let your child discover that learning can be fun!

Hasbro, the world's largest toy company, is now Funskool in India.

LET'S MAKE LEARNING FUN.

FUNSKOOL

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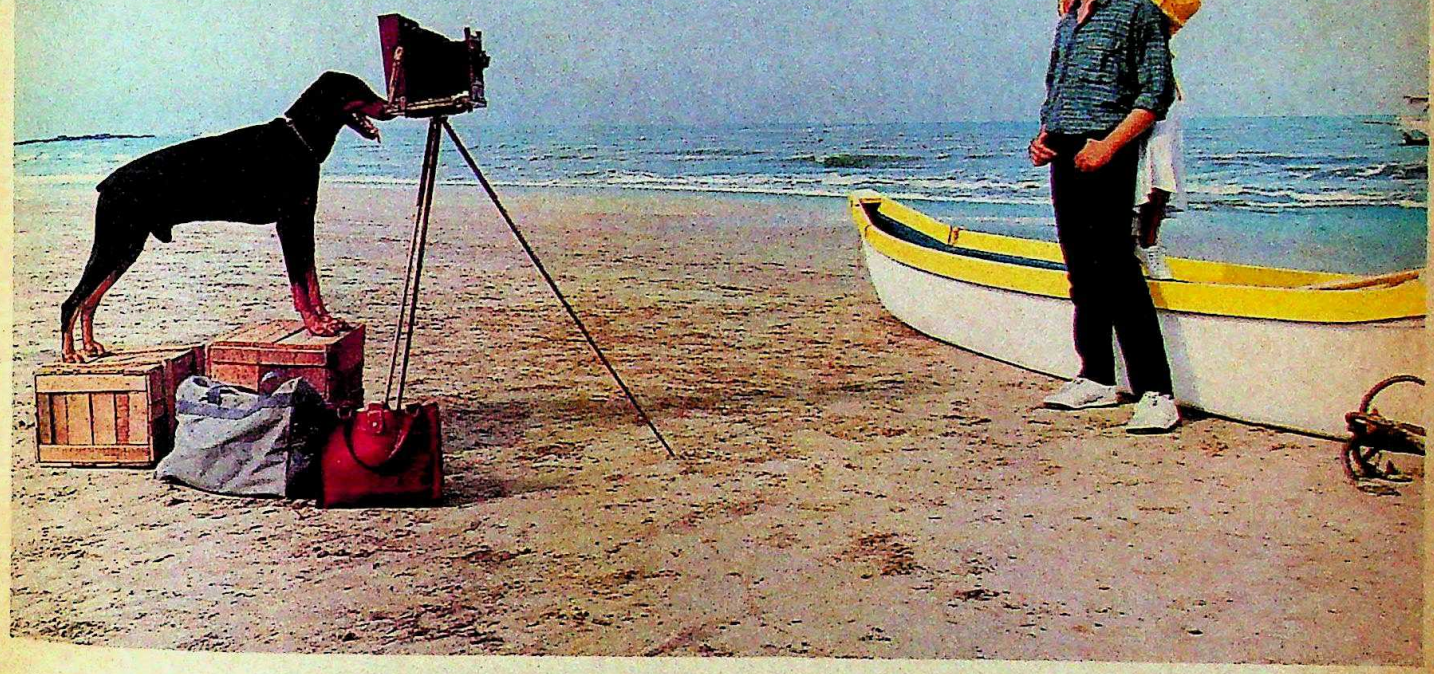
AND WHEN YOU'VE DECIDED TO MEET LIFE HEAD ON, IT'S NICE TO BE DRESSED FOR THE OCCASION.



THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN JEANS. NOW IN INDIA.

Slip into your Wrangler jeans. Feel it snuggle against your skin. Mould itself into your body shape. As only Wrangler can.

Simply because it's made so painstakingly. Thread by thread. So the special polyester core of the thread makes sure it doesn't shred for the entire life of the jeans. The button, the zipper, the rivets, the label are all pure, original Wrangler. Even the material is the same. As many as 70 cruel and minute checks precede any pair of jeans being branded Wrangler. From the classic regular 'Blues' to acid-wash to stone-wash jeans. After all, they are made for rather special people. People who would never accept second best. So when someone says you're looking so free, easy and extremely desirable in your Wrangler jeans, you know it'll stay that way.

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PULLING OUT

EVEN as big business rushes into the food processing industry, one of the recent entrants is calling it a day. Indian Organic Chemicals (IOC)—which is controlled by the Ghias—is hawking its Futura food processing division and has invited bids for its potato and banana processing plants in Bombay and Coimbatore respectively. Expected price: Rs 4.2 crore. Vadilals—the Gujarat-based ice cream company, Voltas, United Breweries, and the RPG group have already submitted bids. In early 1987, IOC's Futura division had invested Rs 4 crore in launching potato wafers called "Niknaks" and in a new company, Convenience Foods, in Coimbatore to produce its "Bonanza" range of banana chips. Both products fared badly on the market. IOC too hit a rough patch and ran up a Rs 5-crore loss. So the polyester staple company wants to raise cash. Meanwhile, IOC has pulled out of Mothercare, the retail shops catering to mothers with children under 12. Prakash Ahuja, till recently senior vice-president of IOC, has reportedly acquired the division. No money changed hands—Ahuja is believed to have swapped his shares in IOC for a controlling interest in Mothercare.

TAKEOVER RUMOURS

IS a corporate predator eyeing Mahindra & Mahindra? Newspaper reports have suggested precisely this, and even named the Hindujas in this regard. The company could be vulnerable to a takeover because the Mahindra family owns around 18 per cent of the stock. Mahindra share prices shot up last fortnight because someone's been buying shares. Whether the Hindujas are involved is not clear, but the Ambanis are believed to have bought about three lakh Mahindra shares from the market, purely as an investment and are said to have offered to sell them to the Mahindras late last fortnight. But with both the Ambanis and the Mahindras declining to comment, the reports could not be confirmed.

DIVERSIFICATION MOVES

MAX India, the Ranbaxy group's Rs 27-crore drug intermediate company, is diversifying into "biocatalysts" or enzymes—which are now largely imported. It has tied up with Japan's Toyo Jozo Company for the purpose. The Rs 5-crore project is meant to produce enzymes, initially for the company's drug intermediates (products that are used to manufacture antibiotics) and later for food processing, soaps and other industries. In yet another diversification, Max has tied up with a Fortune 200 US company for a Rs 6-crore industrial adhesives venture on the outskirts of the capital. While Max has a letter of intent for the project, final government clearances are still awaited.

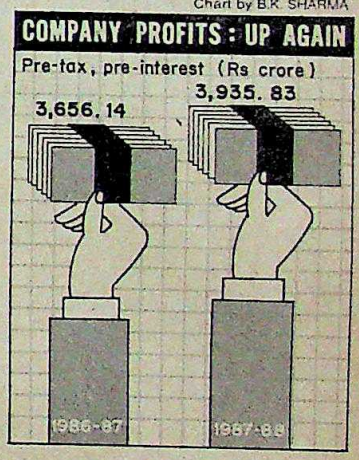
NEW PACKAGE

EVEN as the Chhabria brothers—Manu and Kishore—continue on their spree of takeovers (the latest on their list of acquisitions are General Electric Company India's associate Genelec and Shalimar Paints), plans for a common corporate office for the widely diversified, Rs 1,200-crore conglomerate are slowly taking shape. A new holding company is to be set up, with offices in the metropolitan cities. Several legal and other hurdles still remain to be crossed, and the company's name has yet to be finalised. Nevertheless, in a few months the new enterprise will formally set the seal on the emergence of the Chhabrias as a major force on the Indian business firmament.

PROFITS ON THE RISE

THE latest figures confirm what many had long believed. After dropping for two or three years, company profits are inching up (*see chart*). A study on the financial results of 740 companies in 1987-88 carried out by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy shows that their "operating" (pre-tax and pre-interest) profits climbed by 7.6 per cent last year from the 1986-87 level. The rise in profits does not seem to be just a flash in the pan but part of a general trend. The initial results of studies on corporate results for the six months since last April support the conclusion. But companies have also been forking out 17.5 per cent more dividends to shareholders at the expense of the profits they retain. That could tell on corporate kitties.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



SILICON NAGAR

THANKS to the availability of skilled personnel and its dust-free climate, Bangalore is rapidly becoming India's version of California's Silicon Valley. A host of electronic companies—including Wipro, Sunray Computers, PSI Data Systems, TVS Electronics, and Sonata, the software division of IOC—already operate from the Garden City. Indian companies are not the only ones who have discovered that Bangalore offers several advantages. Joining their ranks will be US software giant Microsoft, which has announced that it will set up a design centre in Bangalore. Several other foreign companies have already set up shop in the city or plan to do so. Texas Instruments has a software export venture. Digital Equipment Corporation will be manufacturing computers in collaboration with Hinditron. The Bull group has announced that it will set up a research and development centre in Bangalore. The list promises to become much longer. At this rate, the city will have to be renamed Silicon Nagar.

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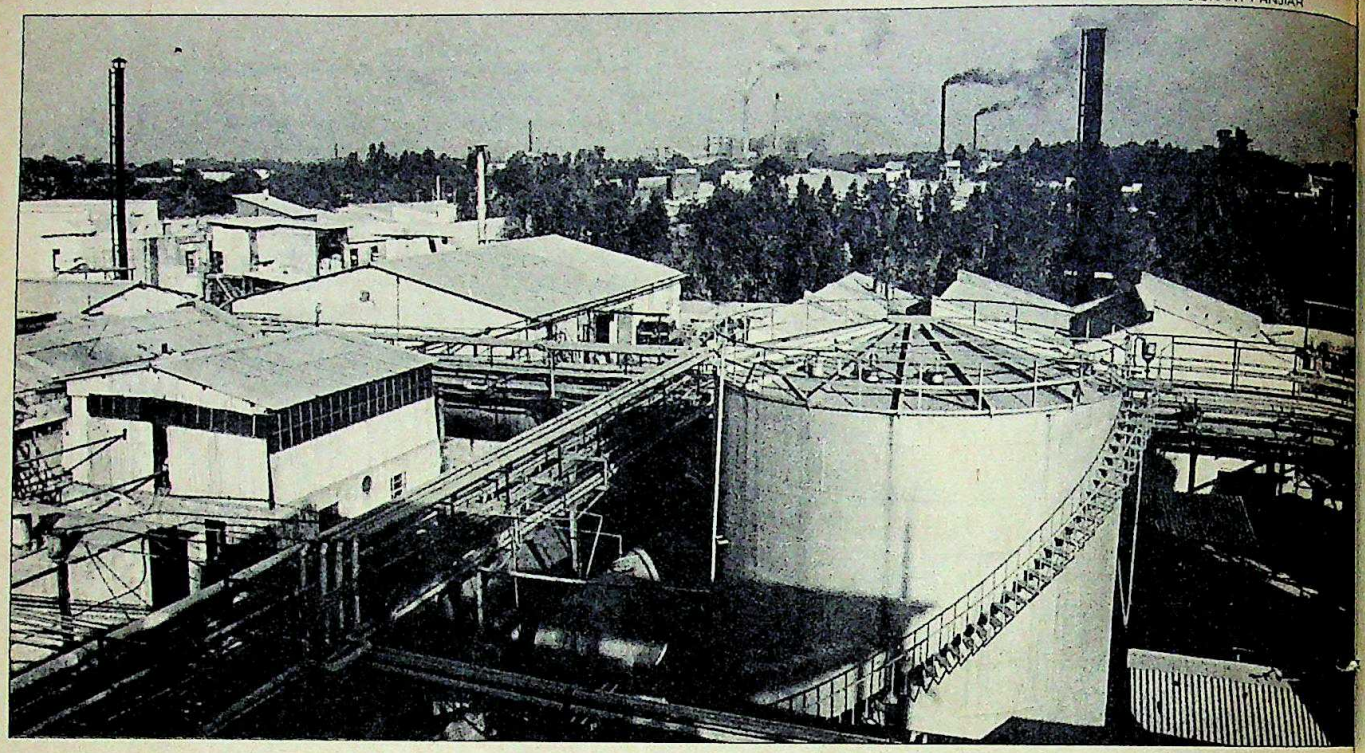
PRASHANT PANJIAR



Faridabad factories: clouded skyline

DELHI INDUSTRIAL BELT

A Capital Growth

As factories multiply, problems emerge

THEY stretch out in a 100-km radius, an endless industrial sprawl. Chimneys reaching for an increasingly clouded sky. Unending rows of factories and sheds. Plush boardrooms and manicured lawns coexisting with cramped sweatshops. Power transmission towers dotting what were once vast open tracts of land.

Slowly, industry has exploded across the face of the nation's capital and the satellite towns that ring it. "When we came here barely two years ago," recalls Jitendra Tiwari, general manager at Sylvania Laxman, "it was like a wilderness. You could see miles of open fields on both sides of the road." Adds Tiwari, who's overseeing the company's recently established fluorescent tubes and television plants at the second phase of the New Okhla Industrial Development Area (NOIDA): "Today I see rows and rows of large brick and steel structures. A new industrial unit seems to be coming up virtually every other week."

Tiwari's right. Delhi, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and other assorted towns that fall in the so-called National Capital Region (NCR)—a 30,000 sq km area that cuts through Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan—are choc-a-bloc with industrial units. Amazingly, by the turn of the century Delhi could well become the single largest industrial belt in the country, bigger even than Bombay or Calcutta. Within weeks, the Centre is to formally unveil its NCR plan, permitting large industrial plants to be set up in the vicinity of the capital—a somersault from its earlier position that large units would not be allowed in the Delhi metropolitan area.

Evidently, the Centre caved in to pressure from the state governments. Indeed, the pressure to industrialise Greater Delhi has been enormous. Lured by the availability of skilled personnel, the prospects of obtaining access to the corridors of power in Delhi and the once-pleasant environment, businessmen have been flocking here from the '50s and '60s.

The numbers tell the tale better. Despite official restrictions, the factory population in the Union territory alone has doubled over the last 12 years, with roughly 4,000 new ones being tagged on "provisionally" every year.

The story is broadly repeated in other satellite towns. Faridabad opened with five factories in 1951. By 1960, the number had shot up to 104. Then in the decade between 1960 and 1970, the number of industrial units multiplied by 600 per cent, before slowing down under the pressures of urbanisation. The spotlight has now swung to new areas in Ghaziabad district such as the stretch from NOIDA to Dadri, where the Hazira-Bijaypur-Jagdishpur gas pipeline is being extended to and to areas in Haryana and Rajasthan (*see map*).

Industrialisation came in waves. First, agro-based and consumer product companies such as Tata Oil Mills and DCM's Hindon River Mills set up shop to cater to the north Indian market. Then the Government decided that factories would get steel and coal at uniform prices throughout the country. Came the second wave of bicycle and automotive enterprises (Atlas, Escorts, Eicher Goodearth, Goodyear), all of whom fed the national market with their wares. In turn, this ushered in hundreds of ancillary units to service their needs.

In between, there were other developments. A refinery at Mathura triggered off further growth. Soon, small and medium sized chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber and glass units (Hilton Rubber, Atul Glass, to name just two) mushroomed in

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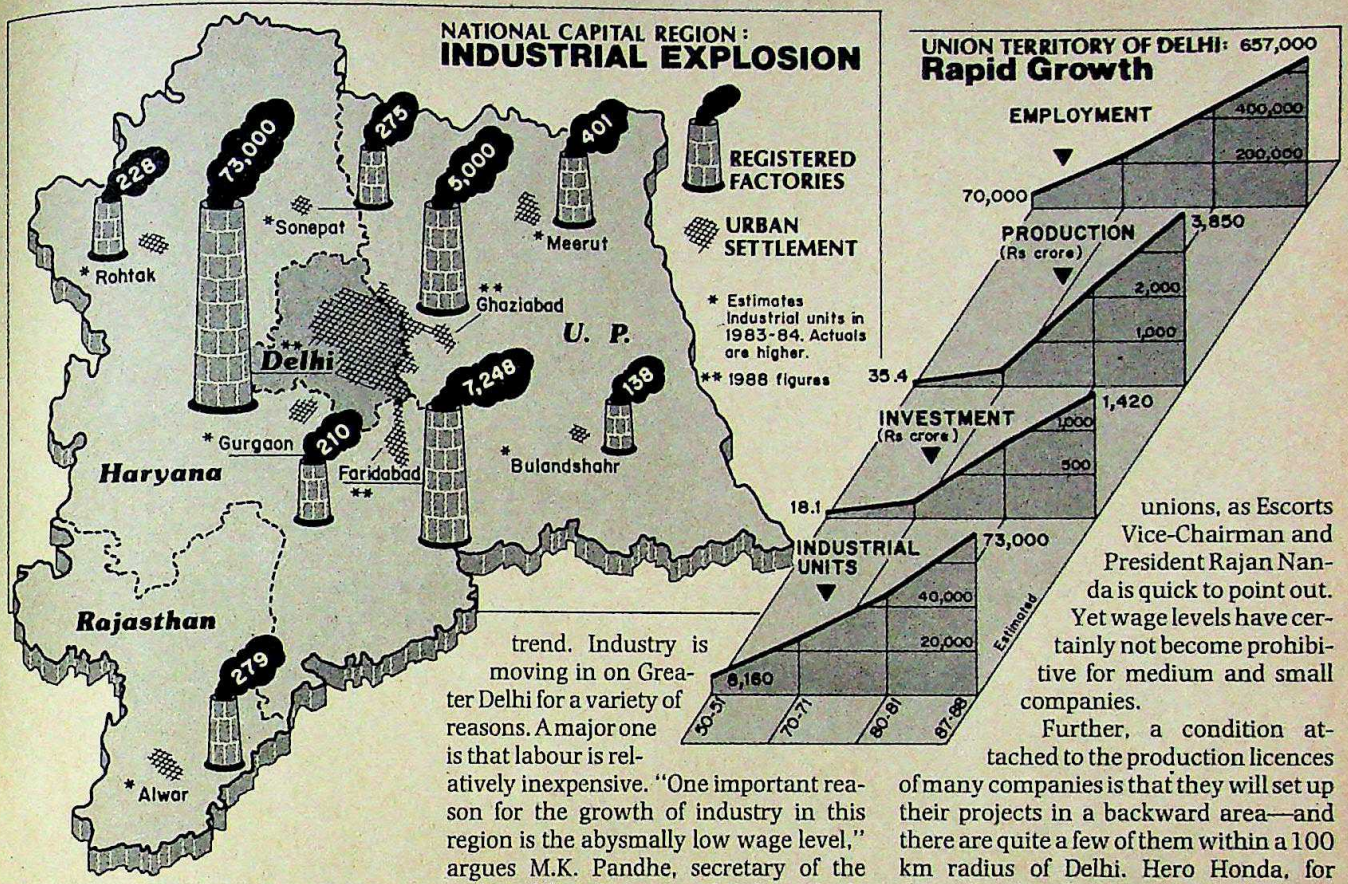
B.K. SHARMA



the vicinity. And government investments in the electronics industry (Bharat Electronics, Central Electronics and the U.P. State Electronics Corporation) brought in its wake a host of television and computer units eager to cash in on the new opportunities in what was then a frontier industry. Later, the automotive industry arrived in full force: Maruti Udyog, DCM Toyota and Hero Honda.

To top it all, many of the companies that recently launched manufacturing establishments in and around the capital are out-of-towners, several of them from Punjab. Explains Manmohan Singh, managing director of Frick India Ltd, the refrigeration equipment manufacturer which has a factory at Faridabad: "With the Punjab problem, some industrialists have put up new units here."

The turbulence in Punjab, however, has merely quickened a worrisome trend. Industry is moving in on Greater Delhi for a variety of reasons. A major one is that labour is relatively inexpensive. "One important reason for the growth of industry in this region is the abysmally low wage level," argues M.K. Pandhe, secretary of the CPI(M)-affiliated Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Confirms Vivek Bharat Ram, managing director of DCM Toyota, whose factory is located at Surajpur, a backward district some 80 km from Delhi: "Labour costs are still lower here than in Bombay." That's changing now for the bigger companies with their organised unions, as Escorts Vice-Chairman and President Rajan Nanda is quick to point out. Yet wage levels have certainly not become prohibitive for medium and small companies.

Further, a condition attached to the production licences of many companies is that they will set up their projects in a backward area—and there are quite a few of them within a 100 km radius of Delhi. Hero Honda, for example, plumped for a site in Haryana rather than in Gujarat, even though Gujarat had offered the motorcycle company more attractive incentives. Says company Managing Director Raman Kant Munjal: "For us, this was the best answer. It fulfilled the basic backward area condition."

A host of companies also cite the availability of manpower and housing. Says Munjal: "We chose a location near Delhi because we could mobilise manpower better."

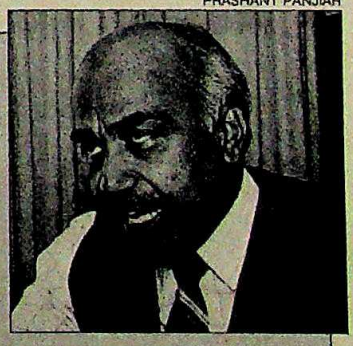
Last but not least is the capital's attraction as a seat of administrative power. Quite candidly, Frick India's Singh says: "All decisions are taken and licences are granted in Delhi. If you're around Delhi, you can get decisions expedited."

The collective rush to the region has brought plenty of problems in its wake. The Haryana Government has of late stepped up electricity supply to manufacturers, but power short-

PRASHANT PANJIAR

"We chose a site near Delhi as we could mobilise manpower better."

RAMAN KANT MUNJAL
managing director, Hero Honda



"The lack of one authority for the region has led to unplanned growth."

R.C. BARAR
managing director, Nuchem plastics

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age has for long been a nightmare at Faridabad. Astonishingly, Faridabad's plants got power for barely 24 hours a week during much of the last two years. "It was worse than what it ever was in West Bengal and Karnataka," says N. Balasundaram, a director of S.K. Birla's VXL India and Faridabad's first entrepreneur. One result: at least 160 units, including Bengal National Textiles, Usha Spinning & Weaving, Fenner India and Fusebase India, have downed shutters in the last decade. The gas-based power plant at Dadri will only marginally help; it won't completely bridge the demand-supply chasm.

There's also no denying that the growth of industry has been and continues to be chaotic. Says R.C. Barar, managing director of Nuchem Plastics and a former president of the Faridabad Industries Association: "The lack of one authority in the region has led to unplanned growth." Conceding the point, a senior NCR board official says: "We have failed to plan the development of housing and the social infrastructure in industrial areas."

THE states have contributed to the problem too. Not a few of them exploit the new industrial townships in their tilt toward the farmer. The Haryana Government collects almost half its tax revenue from Faridabad—but invests barely 5 per cent of the revenue in the city's infrastructure.

The results have been only too visible: a breakdown of the civic infrastructure, a horrendous shortage of housing, transport bottlenecks, pollution, and mounting management-labour strife (*see box*). Compounding the position in the Union territory is the annual population influx of 2.5 lakh.

Much of the problem is the multiplicity of official agencies, many of them working at cross-purposes. This has led to piquant situations. For example, sales tax is lower in Delhi than in the neighbouring states. So factories produce bread and ghee at Ghaziabad, hawk it in Delhi, and most of it is bought by enterprising Ghaziabad residents who take it back there for sale: it still works out cheaper for people at Ghaziabad. "Every day, at least 10,000 persons bring ghee and bread produced here and sold in Delhi back to this place," confirms Man Mohan Goel, president of the Federation of Ghaziabad Industries Associations. "Some of them make as many as five trips a day," says he.

With the region's industrial population poised for a fresh explosion, the prospects of solving some of these problems are dim. The daily movement of vehicles carrying passenger and goods, for example, will climb 55 per cent by 2001 AD, clogging the region's roads. So the overall forecast is: more industrial growth—along with more chaos and further problems.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA
with bureau reports

The Times of India

Workers' rally in Delhi

LABOUR

The New Militancy

IT was unprecedented for north India. Late November, 13-lakh-odd workers in Delhi and its satellites struck work for a week. The basic demand: a hike in the official monthly minimum wage of Rs 562.

The CITU-led strike's success is not clear. Says CITU Delhi state committee General Secretary S.B. Bhardwaj: "We were frankly overwhelmed by the response." But Man Mohan Goel, chairman of the Uttar Pradesh wing of the All India Manufacturers Organisation maintained that the media had played it up. Whatever the truth, one thing is evident—labour militancy has arrived in the industrial belts near Delhi.

Strikes are not new to the capital region. Last year saw more than one violent labour dispute at Faridabad and elsewhere. Led mainly by maverick leaders, these were confined to individual plants. Said a spokesman of one of the national-level unions bluntly: "The phenomenon of gangsters posing as union leaders has gained prominence of late." Apart from such exceptions, labour relations in the area have been cordial, partly because most workers are migrants from villages.

What's new now is that workers have downed tools in an organised general strike. Even P.R. Kumaramangalam, convenor of the All India Congress(I) Committee's labour cell agrees. "What was noteworthy was that many scattered workers came together."

The labour discontent is explained by the paltry wage levels, and the large number of contract or temporary workers. Because many units are closed in the region, unemployment is high and wages are low. A month before the strike, the Government had offered to jack up the minimum wage to Rs 601, but the union demanded Rs 1,050.

However, managements complain that worker productivity is abysmally low. Says an industrialist: "In the last five years, salaries have doubled twice in our company—but productivity does not go up by even 1 per cent once a worker is made permanent." The unions reply that employers should first adhere to labour laws.

Amidst these conflicting positions, Goel warns that, "employers will now feel encouraged to retaliate." Clearly, the going will get rougher in the days ahead.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA

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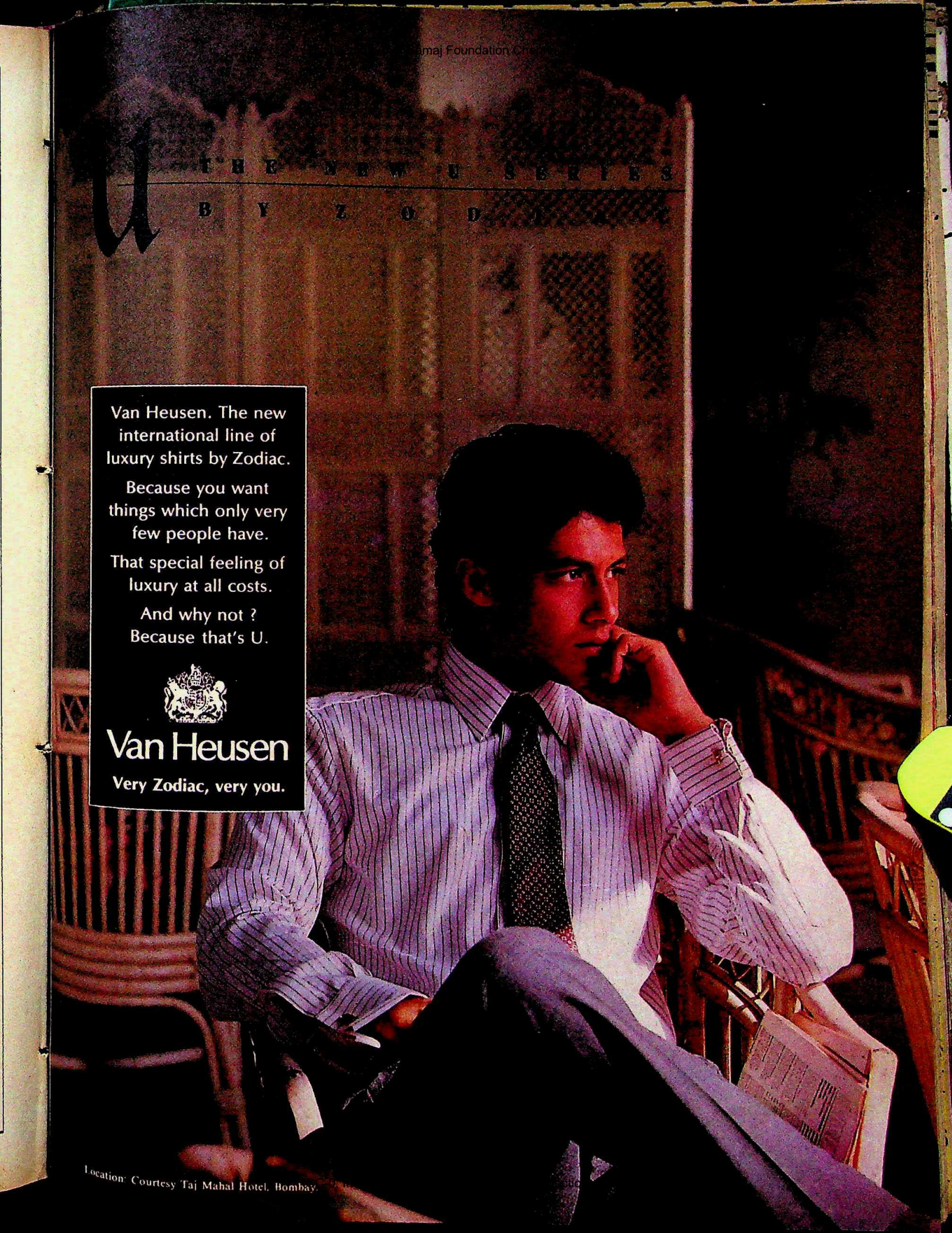

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GREETINGS

THE SEASON'S JOY THIS YEAR. AND YEAR AFTER YEAR.

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Celebrate with Asian Paints

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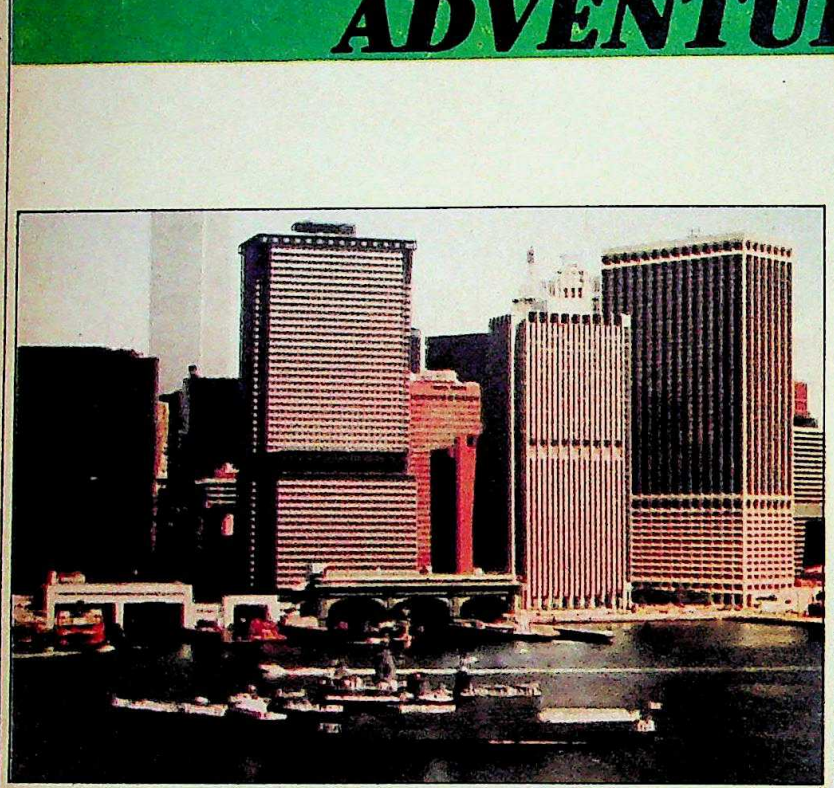
EMBARK ON A VOYAGE OF ADVENTURE



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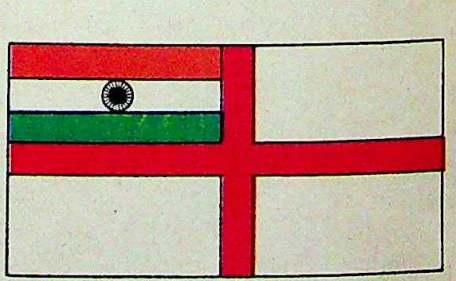

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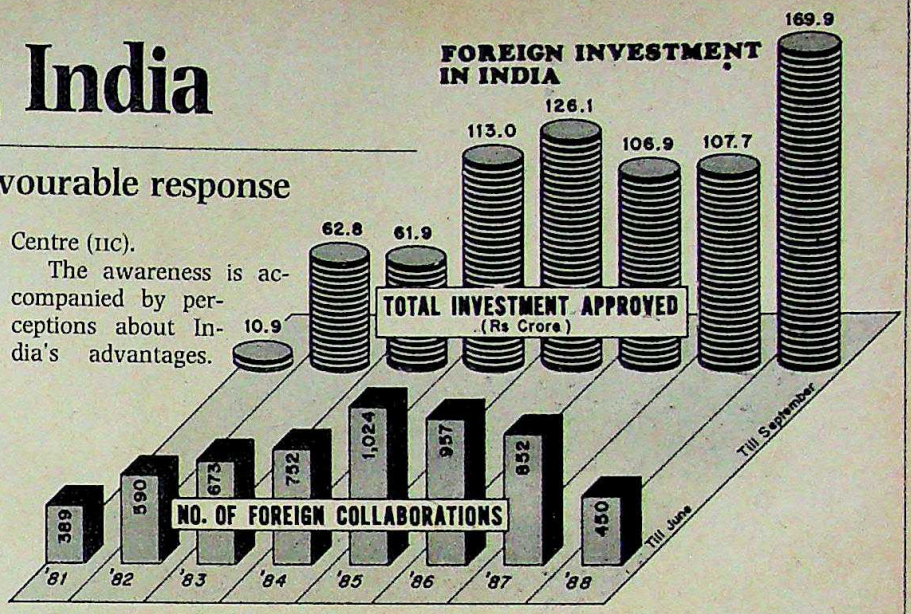
FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Discovering India

Open-door policy elicits favourable response



FOREIGNERS suddenly seem to have discovered the virtues of investing in India. During the first nine months of this year, overseas investment—at almost Rs 170 crore—topped the peak figure for any full year in the past. That's still piffling when compared to the standards of other Asian countries. Even so, the Government's liberalisation policies seem to be paying off.

"We are receiving a tremendous number of offers to set up joint ventures and for technical collaboration agreements from North America and Europe," confirms a spokesman of the Confederation of Engineering Industry, the industry's apex association.

The latest trend reverses a slump in foreign investment, from a high of Rs 126 crore in 1985 to around Rs 107 crore in 1987 (*see chart*). Till September-end, the figure had shot up to almost Rs 170 crore; by the end of the year, this could go up to over Rs 200 crore.

The question is: why the rush now? Obviously, the Government's open door policy has taken time to elicit a response. "The potential investor outside India did not immediately realise the full import of the policy changes, obsessed as he was with myths about the sluggish ways of the bureaucracy here," notes P.E.G. Daubeney, managing director, IEL Limited, the associate of the United Kingdom's ICI group. Some of the policy changes have been significant. It is now much easier to employ foreign nationals in this country and overseas organisations are being allowed to establish joint ventures without Indian partners.

Furthermore, Rajiv Gandhi's frequent jaunts abroad—much as they were criticised at home—appear to have borne fruit. "There is much better awareness today about India's desire for foreign investment," says N.S. Chaudhary, executive director of the Indian Investment Centre (IIC).

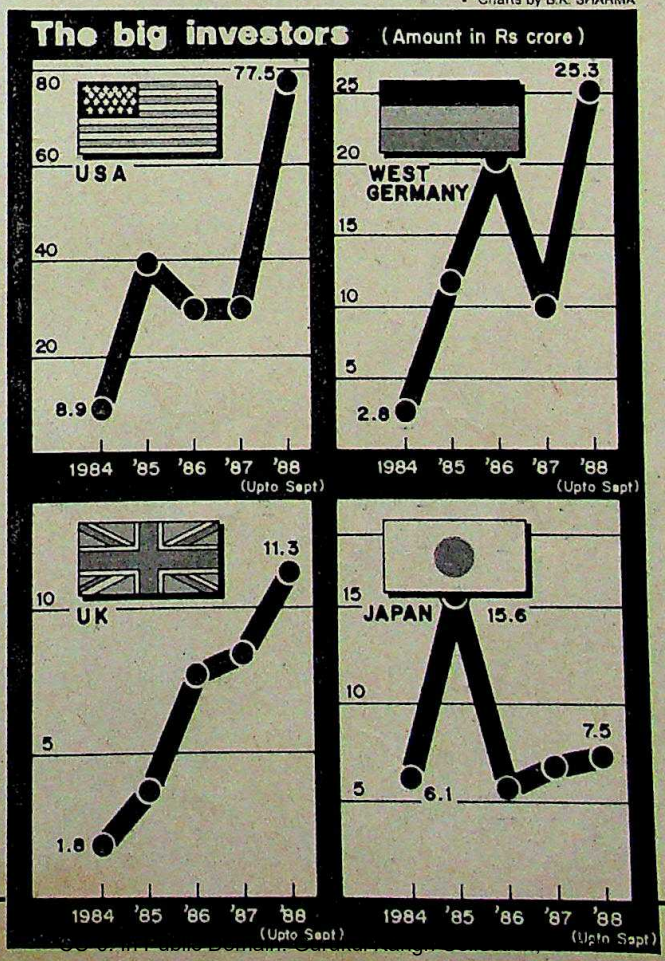
The awareness is accompanied by perceptions about India's advantages. Argues Karl J. Schmidt, commercial attache at the Austrian Embassy in New Delhi: "More and more international companies are realising the importance of gaining a foothold in India—not only on account of her vast market potential, but also because this country is a springboard to markets in South Asia, the Middle East and even the Soviet Bloc." A joint venture of the kind coming up at Gurgaon in Haryana between Austrian company AKG and Peico (formerly Philips) to manufacture high-quality microphones would have been unthinkable a few years ago, says he.

Such sentiments are echoed by Cesare Rossi, who has headed the Bombay-based Indo-Italian Chamber of Commerce for over three decades: "The Indian bureaucracy used to be a tall wall which could be crossed only by large companies that could wait months for approvals. Today it is easier for small entrepreneurs to set up joint ventures."

It's also a trifle easier to clear projects. A year ago, A.F. Ferguson and Company, the management consultants, concluded on the basis of a study that about 30 per cent of foreign investment proposals were not approved within the stipulated 90 days. Applications were either incomplete or were inconsistent with government guidelines on priority industries and areas reserved for the small sector. Chaudhary says that the rejection rate has come down from 30 per cent to between 5 per cent and 8 per cent today because procedures have been streamlined. For instance, since early 1987, the number of Reserve Bank approvals required has been trimmed to four from 14.

Then, international trade fairs held here have provided foreign firms with some exposure to India. This too seems

Charts by B.K. SHARMA



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to have played a role in the fresh spurt of investments, especially West German ones. Affirms Ajit Dayal, Deutsche Bank's executive director at the bank's regional head office in Singapore: "The investment climate is encouraging for investors looking for long-term prospects. We hope to bring more German companies for joint ventures in India." Deutsche Bank is encouraged enough by the trend to have announced plans to open another branch office in Delhi.

Indeed, there's little doubt that this year's investment surge is led by just a few nations: the US, West Germany, and the United Kingdom (*see chart*). And much of the investments continue to be in such traditional growth areas as electrical equipment, industrial machinery, chemicals and instruments—sectors where India wants to catch up with the world.

Despite the good news on the foreign investment front, there's plenty of room for caution. On an average, the foreign investment per venture is still under Rs 1 crore. Also, trade still gets top billing among some of India's biggest foreign investors. One example: Japan. Interestingly, the alleged pay-offs by Japan's Sumitomo to two Indian firms exceeds the total direct investment by all Japanese companies in any one of the last three years.

And foreigners tend to view the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act and the 40 per cent cut-off point for foreign investment in equity as road-blocks to investment—though companies here are controlled with smaller equity stakes. Says P. Balakrishna, an independent consultant who represents foreign companies: "It's difficult for most foreigners to realise that a company can be effectively controlled in India with well below 40 per cent of the equity. They feel secure only if they control the majority shareholding."

Planning Commission Member Raja Chelliah makes an additional point: while foreigners are expected to invest Rs 210 crore in India this year, the "amount looks puny in relation to the Rs 2,800-crore worth of overseas investment that's expected to come to China." Last year, four other Asian countries, including Indonesia, received foreign investments of over Rs 1,400 crore. According to one estimate, the private sector alone will be required to raise foreign funds amounting to over Rs 4,300 crore a year for the next five years. Clearly, India still has a long way to go.

—PARANJOY GUHA THAKURTA

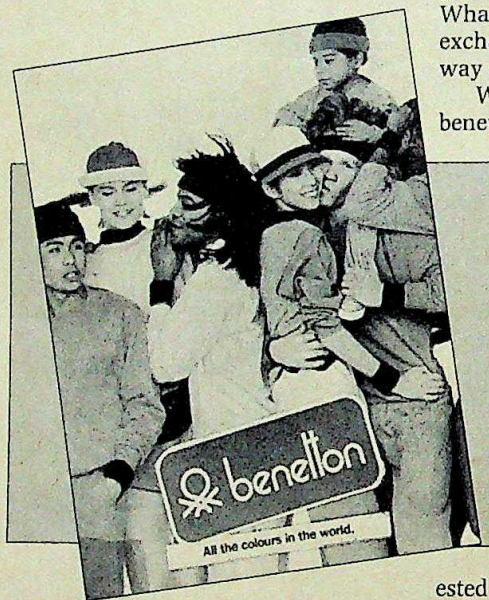
BENETTON

Indian Debut

Italian label hits town

PRINCESS Diana and her children sport the Benetton label. Jane Fonda swears by it. Very soon, trendy Indians may do so too.

For, Italian fashion house Benetton (worldwide sales: $500 million—Rs 750 crore—last year) is poised to make a splash in India in partnership with the Bombay-based Dalton Fashions, the garment exporting enterprise. The outcome could well be a profusion of upmarket casual wear.



In an unusual deal Benetton has tied up with an Indian company Dalton Fashions to produce a range of casual wear.

Beginning this month, a chain of Benetton stores will sprout all over the country—three in Bombay, two in New Delhi and one in Calcutta. Indeed, the ambitious plans envisage six new outlets a year. Company founder Luciano Benetton already has some 5,000 retail shops in 72 countries, but the high priest of casual wear is set on opening a store a day, as he's done for the last three years.

The clothes are to be made here, entirely from locally available fabric. And synthetics are a no-no: only natural fibres will be used. Says Karima Bora, Benetton's Italian representative who is the project coordinator: "Everything, from the shop front to designs, will be standardised. There will be slight modifications in designs considering the weather here."

Dalton Managing Director Surendra Dalmia is enthusiastic about the project's prospects. The goal, says Dalmia, is to cater to fashion-conscious Indians in the 14 to 45 age group. The price-tags will be pretty stiff, starting at Rs 350.

The deal with Dalton is unusual. Dalton is to be a Benetton label sublicensee for south Asia, with the Italian company supplying the prototypes and designs at the start of every fashion season. But both Bora and Dalmia are cagey on detail. The company has obtained government approval and complied with the laws of the land, they maintain. And both insist that the project carries no export obligation. What's more, they claim that no foreign exchange outgo is involved, either by way of royalties or fees.

Why then is Benetton being so benevolent? "Benetton is initially interested in gaining a foothold in the Indian market," says Bora. However, investment in the project's machinery and in real estate will probably be substantial. One outlet in Bombay is housed at the new Oberoi hotel's swanky shopping arcade.

The terms of the deal may seem unique, but the Government has in recent times relaxed restrictions on foreign brand names being used in the domestic market, for garment exporters.

Indeed, Benetton is not the only foreign clothing manufacturer to move into India. Several others, such as Wrangler jeans, have done so in the recent past. Now Pierre Cardin wants to hawk leather goods in Bombay. He recently advertised for shop space in the local newspapers. Others are waiting in the wings too.

For close to two decades, India served as the manufacturing base for the European and US garments market. It's still a base, but the Europeans and the Americans are now arriving here—in force, with *haute couture*.

—S.N. VASUKI

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Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

BIHAR

An Industrial Stimulus

Big business houses roped in to invest

WHEN Bihar Chief Minister Bhagwat Jha Azad alighted at Patna airport last month after a prolonged stay in New Delhi, most of the waiting ministers, legislators and journalists expected some bad political news. Instead Azad beamed, joked with Industrial Development Commissioner N.K. Singh, and, triumphantly waving his hands, declared: "I have come with some good news for the state."

For backward Bihar, the news was astonishing. A galaxy of big business groups, including the Birlas, the Modis and the Bharat Rams, had decided to invest over Rs 1,500 crore in the state. Azad quickly claimed that the state's climate for industrial investment had distinctly improved, and this was "borne out by the significant interest evinced by leading private sector entrepreneurs in several large projects."

Weeks before Azad sprang his announcement, activity at Vikas Bhawan (which houses the once-lethargic industries department) quickened. Commissioner Singh and his officials worked overtime for months, digging up old files, sifting through documents and going on whistle-stop tours to talk to industrialists outside the state.

The upshot is a lengthy list of exciting new projects for Bihar (*see box*). If all of them take off, they will help alter the state's industrial map. Still, many of these projects have been hanging fire for years. In a joint statement, 21 dissident Congress(I) legislators have accused Azad of distorting facts: "What he claims are the Centre's gifts to Bihar are old letters of intent procured during Bindeswari Dubey's regime." Adds Bihar Chamber of Commerce President B.P. Gupta: "If we go through the press statements of the last 10 years, we'll find that the same old projects are yet to be completed." They are right. What is new is that the government of Azad has been able to persuade New Delhi to clear them.

Officials maintain that the last Congress(I) government headed by veteran trade unionist Bindeshwari Dubey was not overly concerned about wooing industrialists to the state. "Dubey," says one official, "talked to Tata Steel Chairman Russi Mody more like a trade unionist than a chief minister. So Mody withdrew his proposals to invest more money in Bihar." JK Synthetics too backed out of a Rs 100-crore polyester filament yarn project (which has now been taken up by Somani) for similar reasons. Complains a JK Synthetics spokesman: "The Government never took serious interest in the matter. Ministers went on fighting among themselves over the location and allotment of land for the project for over two years."

However, Tata Steel has now returned to the state Government with Rs 800 crore worth of investment proposals. Said Mody cautiously: "I will not divulge anything at this moment, but the political climate has certainly changed."

It is the changed official attitudes that largely—but not entirely—explain the corporate rush to Bihar. Says Umesh Modi, chairman of Bihar Sponge Iron Ltd, one of the new projects: "The bureaucracy may be slow, but it's not negative. My experience has been fruitful." A spokesman of the Birla-owned Orient Paper explains that his company is setting up cement, paper and newsprint projects in Bihar because the state Government had promised to provide good infrastructure and unlimited power. "The Government seems to be genuinely interested in helping new investors," says he. Summing up the business position, Arvind Pandey, the state-owned Steel Authority of India's (SAIL) director for corporate planning, says the burst of corporate activity is due to the Government's keenness to industrialise the state.

Few would deny that the Government is keen. It's bending over backwards to help out-of-state industrialists. For example, the Government has already provided land to Orient Paper and agreed to build a road-cum-rail bridge over the Sone river so that limestone can be transported to the factory, which is on the other side of the river. Equally important, the state Government has set up a committee headed by the chief minister to closely monitor the progress of projects and promote large investments

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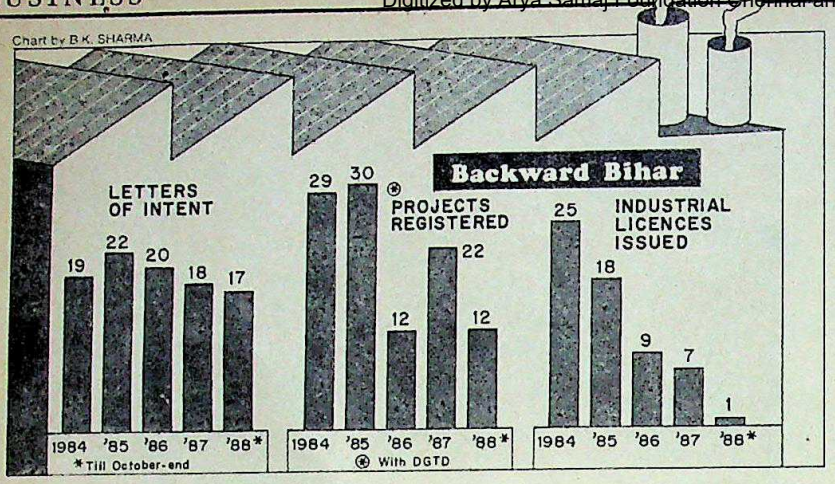

in the state.

The Government's strategy, says Singh, is to utilise downstream products turned out by existing industrial undertakings, recycle waste, and harness the state's raw materials for industrial growth. So the caprolactum project will use SAIL's surplus benzene, and ammonia and nitrogen from the Fertiliser Corporation of India's fertliser complex at Sindri. The aluminium project at Sindri will draw on Bihar's rich bauxite deposits. And C.K. Birla's paper and newsprint plant at Kumarbagh is to utilise the bagasse that's freely available in an area that houses a chain of sugar mills. "This is the philosophy—better recycling of agro-waste," argues Singh.

CLEARLY, the availability of raw materials also goes a long way in explaining the rush to Bihar. No one admits it, but companies are anxious to set up projects close to raw material sources.

Whatever the reasons, Bihar will only hurrah the latest trend. Between 1974 and 1987, the state snared just 40 industrial licences. In contrast, Gujarat bagged 327, Maharashtra obtained 352 and neighbouring Uttar Pradesh an astonishing 880 licences in the 14-year period. What's more, Bihar has witnessed a flight of capital, with several local businessmen (B.P. Gupta, Harish Modi, D.P. Saboo, D.P. Aggrawal) shifting their factories to other states.

One result: industry in Bihar has grown languorously by roughly 2.5 per cent a year over the last decade, while states like Maharashtra have notched up annual industrial growth rates of 15 per cent.

Another outcome has been the toll on new jobs. While factories around the country have been providing more jobs every year for decades, just the opposite has been happening in Bihar: factory-generated employment has been dropping. Says Ajit Mozoomdar, who's heading a Planning Commission-funded study on the state's poor performance at New Delhi's Centre for Policy Research: "Bihar has become the symbol of a basket case."

Nevertheless, some believe that big industrial projects alone won't solve the state's problems. Parts of Bihar are flush with heavy industry. Yet despite its large consumer market, the state is home to relatively few medium-sized units or consumer product manufacturers.

"We had a large faith in large industry," confesses Mozoomdar, a former Planning Commission secretary who was Bihar's director of industries years ago. "No doubt they've helped. But we didn't appreciate how little spread effect they have," says he. Economist Saibal Gupta, who works at Patna's A.N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies, backs the point. According to offiicial figures, industrial units in the state annually buy some Rs 1,050 crore worth of spare parts and ancillaries. Yet hardly 15 per cent of this comes from local units.

The state's highly politicised militant labour, perennial power shortages and multitude of official agencies whose permission is required to set up shop could also continue to deter investors. Says Modi: "It's a tough job out there. Bihar is the only state I've seen where construction workers demand jobs in the factory." He also complains of government inefficiency and of the multiplicity of official developmental companies in the state. Not surprisingly, an official delegation which recently went to the US to lure NRI investors returned empty-handed. (Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar, on the other hand, garnered NRI commitments to invest in projects worth over Rs 1,200 crore.)

Clearly, while the big projects offer Bihar some hope, much more remains to be done before the transformation of a troubled state begins—the official rhetoric notwithstanding.

—FARZAND AHMED with bureau reports

INVESTMENT

Major Influx

IT'S a roster to write home about. Among the business groups heading for Bihar with projects are:

► The Shrirams. Shriram Fibres is launching a Rs 400-crore caprolactum project, along with Bihar State Industrial Development Corporation (BSIDC). The state-owned Steel Authority of India (SAIL) and the Fertiliser Corporation of India (FCI) will be supplying the raw materials.

► C.K. Birla's Orient Paper & Industries Ltd. which is setting up a Rs 305-crore paper and newsprint venture based on bagasse at Kumarbagh in West Champaran district in association with two state government undertakings. Orient Paper has also joined hands with SAIL and the state Government to promote a million-tonne cement plant at Bokaro. Estimated cost: Rs 180 crore.

► Industrialist Ashish Somani and BSIDC are taking up a Rs 120-crore polyester filament yarn project at Bihea in Bhojpur district.

► Birla Technical Services and Birla Engineering are promoting a Rs 100-crore aluminium products project at Sindri.

► The Bangalore-based Khoday liquor group is launching industrial alcohol, polystyrene and styrene projects costing Rs 80 crore, all in north Bihar.

► Umesh Modi's Rs 112-crore sponge iron project at Chandil near Jamshedpur, which goes on stream next month, is doubling production capacities, from 1.5 lakh tonnes to 3 lakh tonnes.

► The Tatas have sought permission to implement a Rs 2,500-crore expansion scheme at Tata Steel, and have a proposal up their sleeves to put up a cement plant and a ball-bearing unit.

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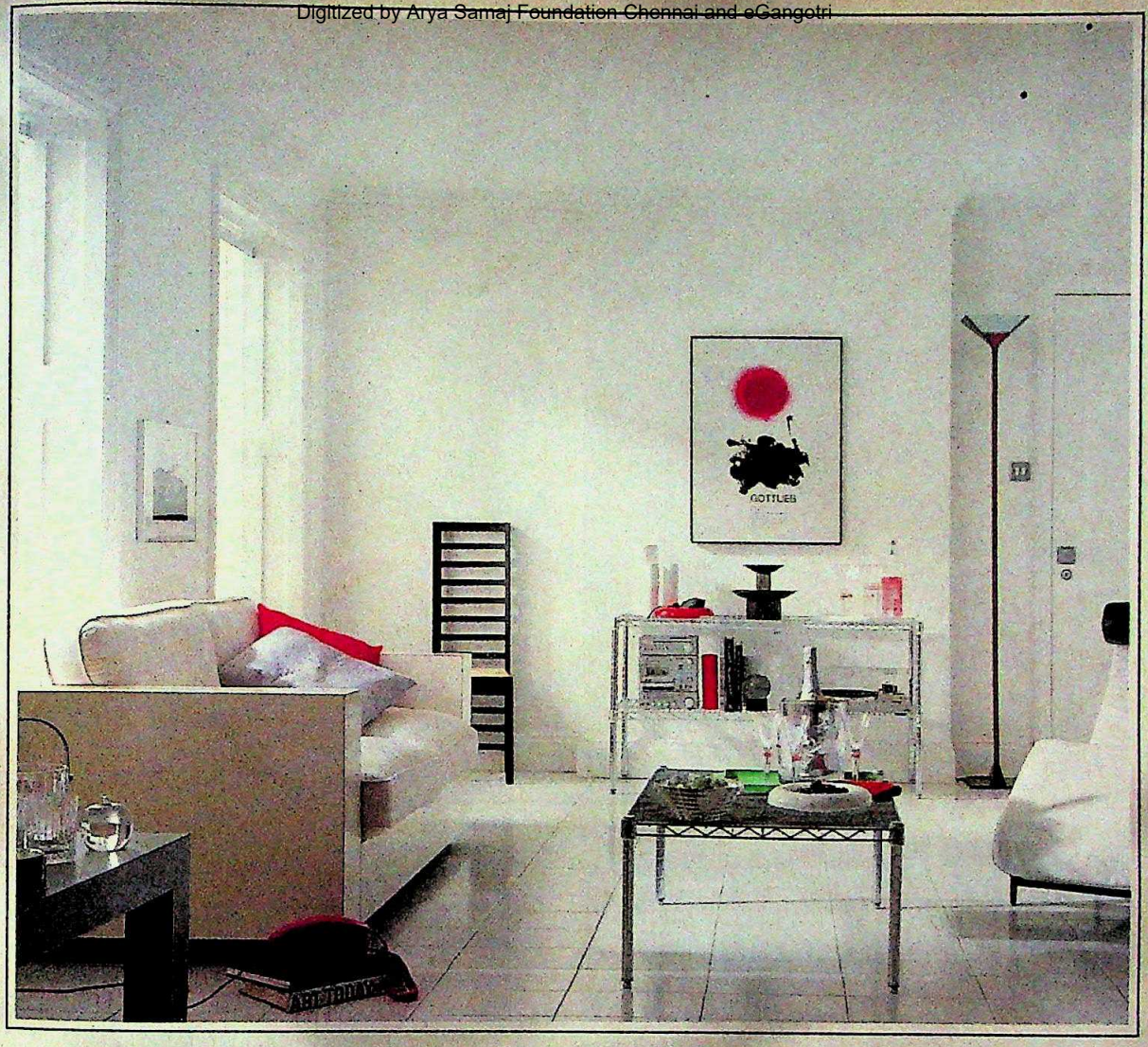

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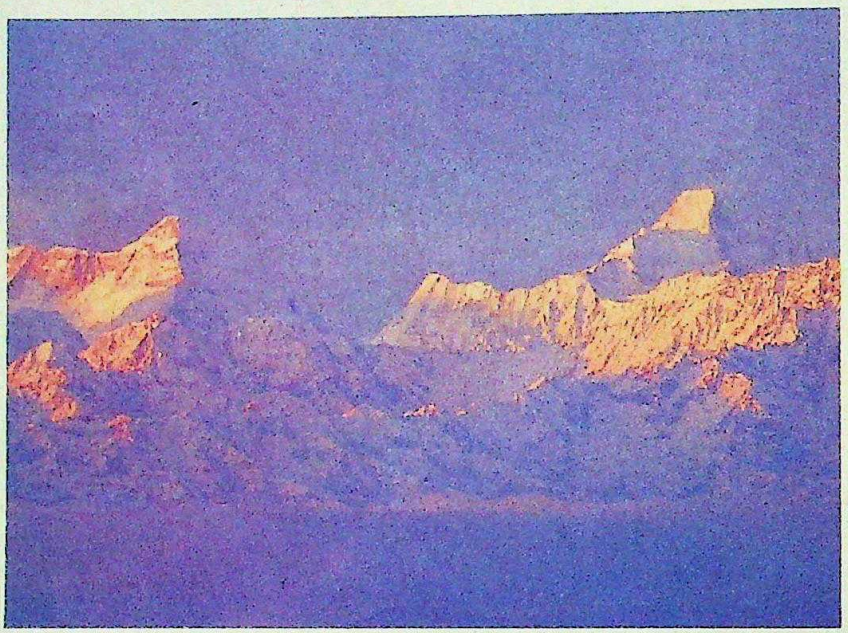

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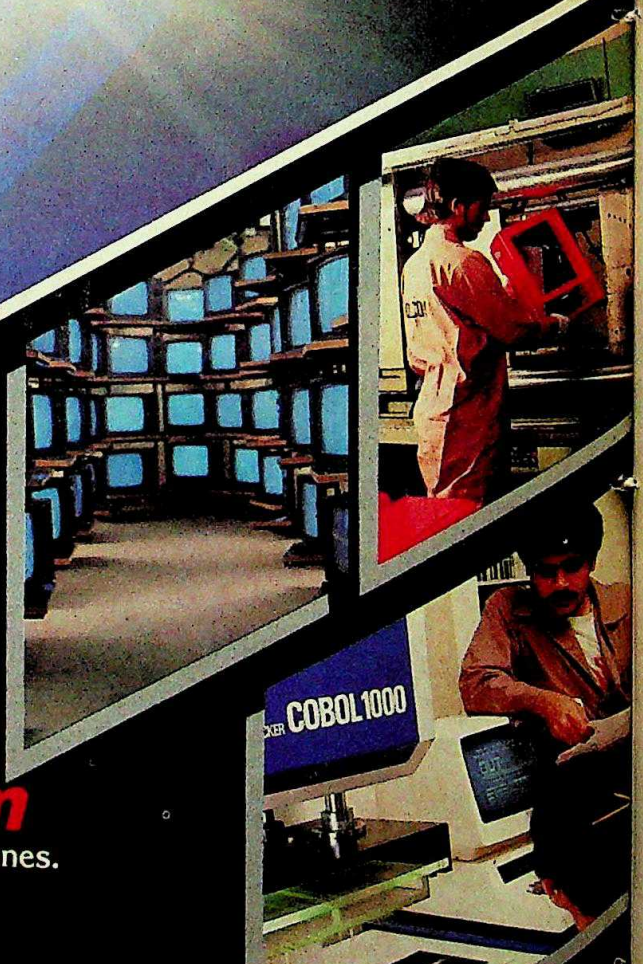

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DURGAPUR

A Dream Sours

Industries in dire straits

IT was meant to be the industrial hub of the eastern region. But 35 years after it was set up, Durgapur is in the dumps. Far from being the Great Big Hope that the late prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the late West Bengal chief minister B.C. Roy had envisaged, the city continues to languish.

Most of Durgapur's big public sector units are in sick bay. So are several private concerns. And with the industries in dire straits, over 125 ancillary and small units have been idle for months. Perhaps the best symbol of Durgapur's plight is its industrial estates: sheds are either vacant or have been rented as office space to government organisations.

Durgapur was planned as an integrated industrial town after the Damodar Valley Corporation, the power company, put up a barrage on the Damodar river in the late '50s. Power was available, as was coal (from the adjoining Raniganj-Asansol belt). Soon enough, companies set up shop in the town. The public sector was represented by, among others, Durgapur Steel Plant (DSP), Alloy Steels Plant, Mineral & Allied Machinery Corporation (MAMC) and Hindustan Fertiliser Corporation (HFC). The private sector too arrived in force: ACC Babcock Limited (ABL), Durgapur Cement, Graphite India and Philips Carbon Black. Together, they represented an impressive investment of over Rs 1,000 crore.

Today, however, HFC's unit is closed; ABL (now in the public sector) reopened this June after a 20-month lockout but still limps along; and MAMC has stopped production due to a lack of orders.

Several factors have combined to sour the dream. The major hitch was, and is, the poor infrastructure. Enough power has never been available. As a result, companies have rarely put their full capacities to use. Over the last decade, the Steel Authority of India's plant dipped into the red by over Rs 500 crore owing to a 35 per cent power shortfall. Water is scarce too. The West Bengal Housing Board had to give up a house construction project for this reason.

Surplus labour and militant unions too have curtailed Durgapur's industrial possibilities. At HFC's plant, workers were accused of tampering with a fertiliser bag stitching machine so that they could do the work manually and earn overtime. At MAMC, workers on night shift were allowed to sleep for three hours. Says Paritosh Banerjee, general manager at ABL: "Weak managements took the easy way out to buy peace."

Economist Bhabatosh Datta blames managements for letting plants run down. "One basic problem in Durgapur has been the total absence of a maintenance culture. Assets were created and never looked after."

Compounding this is the state Government's inefficiency. Says B. Achari, managing director of Oxide India: "Small units haven't bloomed due to a not too encouraging bureaucracy." His company can't avail of a Rs 32-lakh loan from the West Bengal Financial Corporation simply because the Urban Land Ceiling Department hasn't yet given the clearance for new factory premises.

And when bureaucratic delays have not taken their toll, the sheer lack of official pragmatism has. Says Anil Bhandari, deputy director of the government's Small Industries Service Institute: "One has to pay a rent of Rs 1.90 per sq ft in the sheds provided at government industrial estates, which means at least Rs 4,000 for an area of 2,000 sq ft. This most entrepreneurs cannot afford."

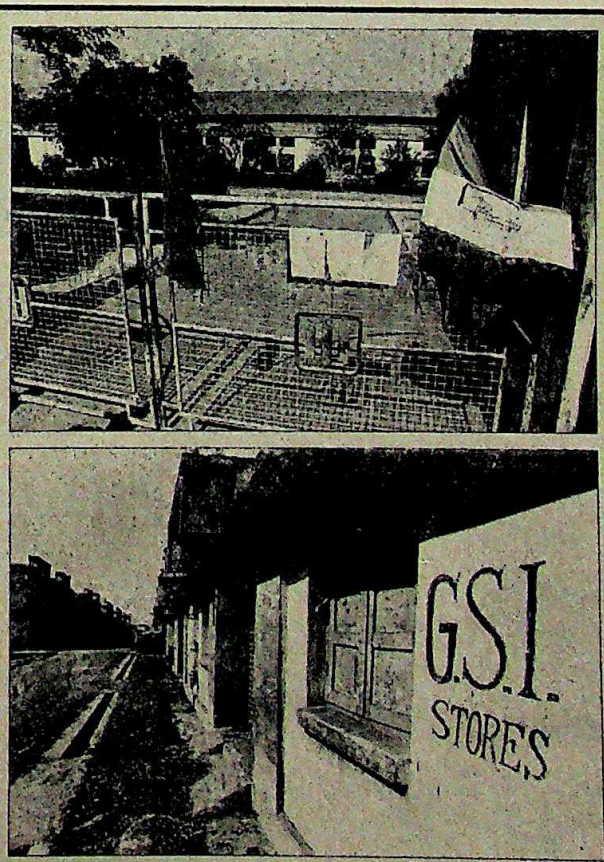
Poor planning has also affected the city's industrial outlook. The state government-owned Durgapur Chemicals Ltd (DCL), many of whose plants are closed, was supposed to have triggered off a host of downstream units. But raw materials weren't available. Ironically, today the city-based East India Pharmaceuticals has to get its raw materials from out of town as DCL is unable to supply them. "This has hiked our costs," complains an official of the company.

Predictably, the Congress(I) accuses the state Government of having neglected Durgapur, which remains a ragtag cluster of widely separated townships. Communications are poor, and the bus service is unreliable. A government official privately admits that the Asansol-Durgapur Development Authority does not have enough cash to maintain roads and provide street lights. Its annual budget has been doubled to Rs 7 crore this year, but even this may be inadequate.

Industries Secretary P.K. Sarkar, however, replies: "There has been no neglect of Durgapur. In fact, the state has invested substantially in Durgapur Projects Ltd despite a resources crunch." But even Sarkar concedes that the city could have been better developed if the Government wasn't strapped for cash.

The position could change a bit as DSP will be spending a hefty Rs 1,357 crore on its modernisation, and some of the cash will go into the community. Still, it's ironical that while the nation spends crores of rupees celebrating Nehru's centenary, his dream city starves for lack of cash.

—KAMALJEET RATTAN



Photographs by SAIBAL DAS

A closed factory (top); and a small unit now a store

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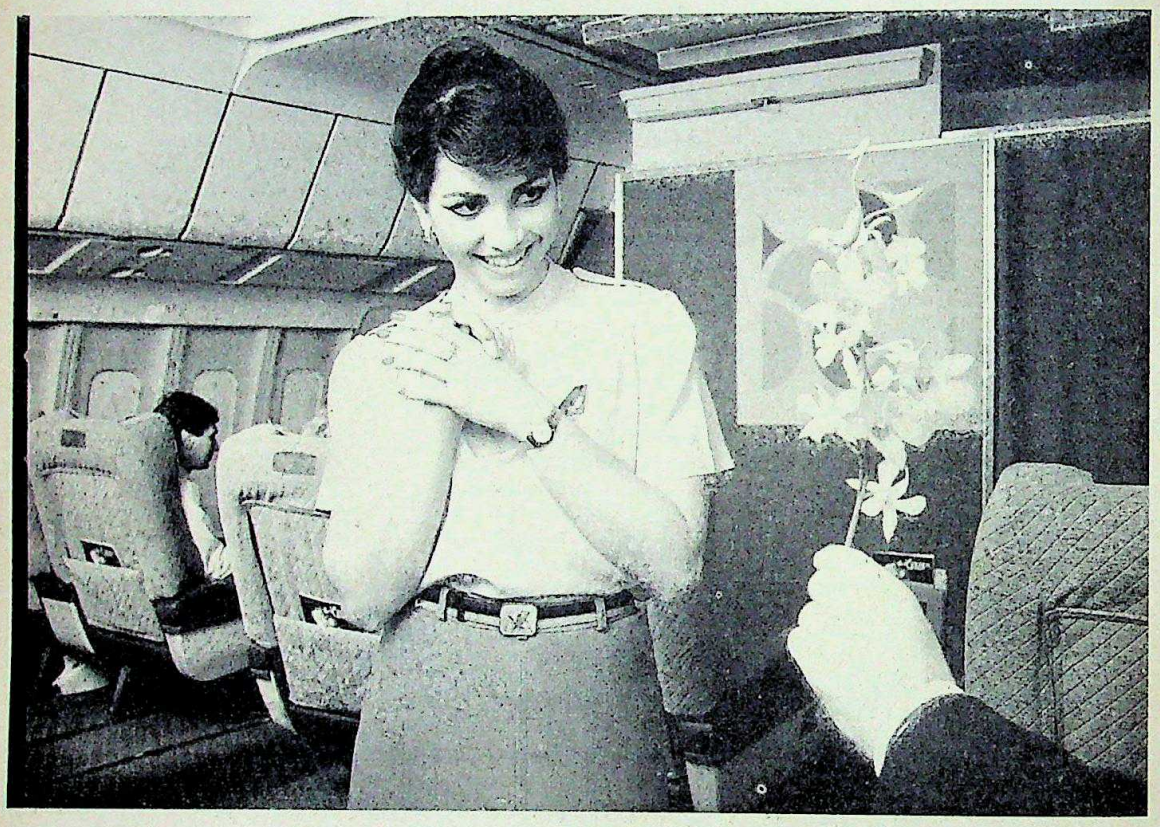

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BRITANNIA INDUSTRIES

A Big Bite

Rajan Pillai pulls off a coup

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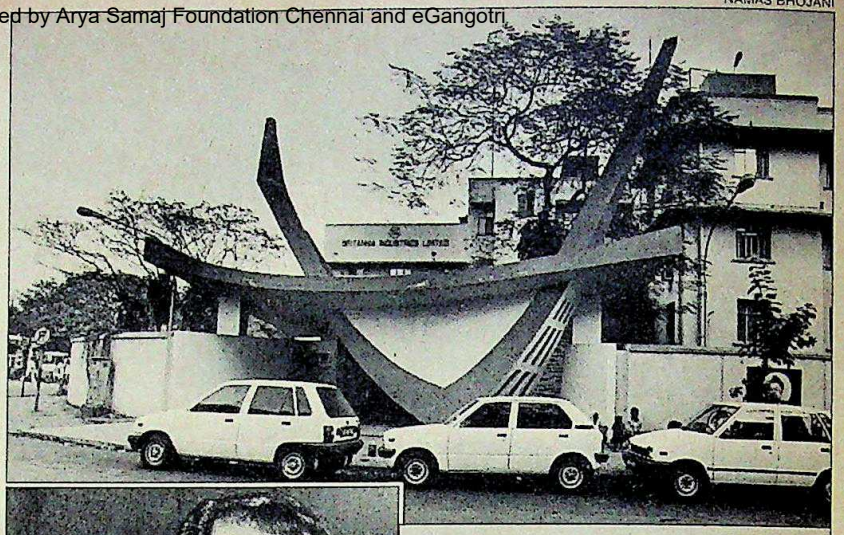

Rajan Pillai (left); and the company's Bombay office: dramatic developments

In an offshore deal, Britannia Chairman Pillai bought 38 per cent of Britannia's equity from Nabisco. He also acquired three other profitable Nabisco subsidiaries.

MOVE over Hinduja and Swraj Paul, Rajan Pillai's here. Rajan who? Janardhana Mohandas Rajan Pillai, 41, the London-based chairman of Britannia Industries.

In a coup that stunned the Indian corporate world and pitchforked him into the big league, Pillai acquired 38 per cent of the Rs 192-crore Britannia's equity last fortnight. What's more, he bought three profitable RJR-Nabisco subsidiaries in Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore from the American conglomerate.

These dramatic developments have perhaps put the low profile Pillai on the way to becoming Asia's processed foods king. His four newly-acquired companies together account for sales of an impressive $300 million (Rs 450 crore) and assets of $60 million (Rs 90 crore). Contacted over the telephone in London, the dapper Britannia chairman said: "Naturally, I'm elated."

Pillai and his family already owned 11 per cent of Britannia's equity, which had been bought as an investment a year or two ago. His latest acquisition takes his stake in the Indian biscuit and bread company to 49 per cent. The financial institutions own another 25 per cent of the company's shares, and the public holds the rest.

The headline-hitting overseas deal is the outcome of RJR-Nabisco changing hands. In the messiest and largest battle in corporate history, American leveraged buy out firm Kohlberg, Kravis, Roberts & Company (KKR)—which specialises in companies that buy their own shares to protect themselves against raiders—took over RJR-Nabisco by forking out a whopping $25 billion (Rs 37,500 crore). KKR had laid siege to RJR-Nabisco from mid-October. Fearing a takeover, Nabisco head Ross Johnson offered shareholders $75 (Rs 1,125) per share. KKR upped the ante to $90 (1,350), Johnson offered $100 (1,500), till KKR eventually came up with an unbeatable offer, and bagged the 19th largest US corporation.

At the end of the bruising battle, RJR-Nabisco owed $22.8 billion (Rs 34,200 crore) to bankers and bondholders—and desperately needed cash. Solution: hawk profitable divisions worldwide, including Britannia and the three Nabisco subsidiaries in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

Enter Pillai, who was area president (Asia, Africa, Pacific) of International Nabisco Brands, which oversees Nabisco's international operations, as well as chairman and chief executive officer of Nabisco Commodities, a RJR-Nabisco trading arm. (Oddly, Pillai still holds these positions, thanks to an assurance KKR made to Nabisco that senior executives would be retained. He says he'll stick on—"unless I'm fired.")

According to Pillai, it was clear by the last week of November that Britannia and Nabisco's three other Asian subsidiaries would fall into his lap. Owing to a "special arrangement" with Nabisco, Pillai had the first option to buy the Nabisco stake in them. "The agreement simply states that whenever Nabisco decided to sell its Indian, Singapore, Hong Kong and Malaysian operations I would be given the first option," says he.

Clearly, the time had arrived to exercise that option. He quickly winged his way to New York. Over the next three days (November 30 to December 3), the fast-talking Pillai was closetted with the head of International Nabisco Brands, taking time out in between to contact his bankers for finance. Finally, the deal was clinched on December 6.

Pillai does not envisage any problems with the Finance Ministry or the Reserve Bank of India in having the takeover ratified. "It's an offshore deal like Ashok Leyland's. I'm a non-resident and so there should be no problems," he says.

Still, the details of the sale are not

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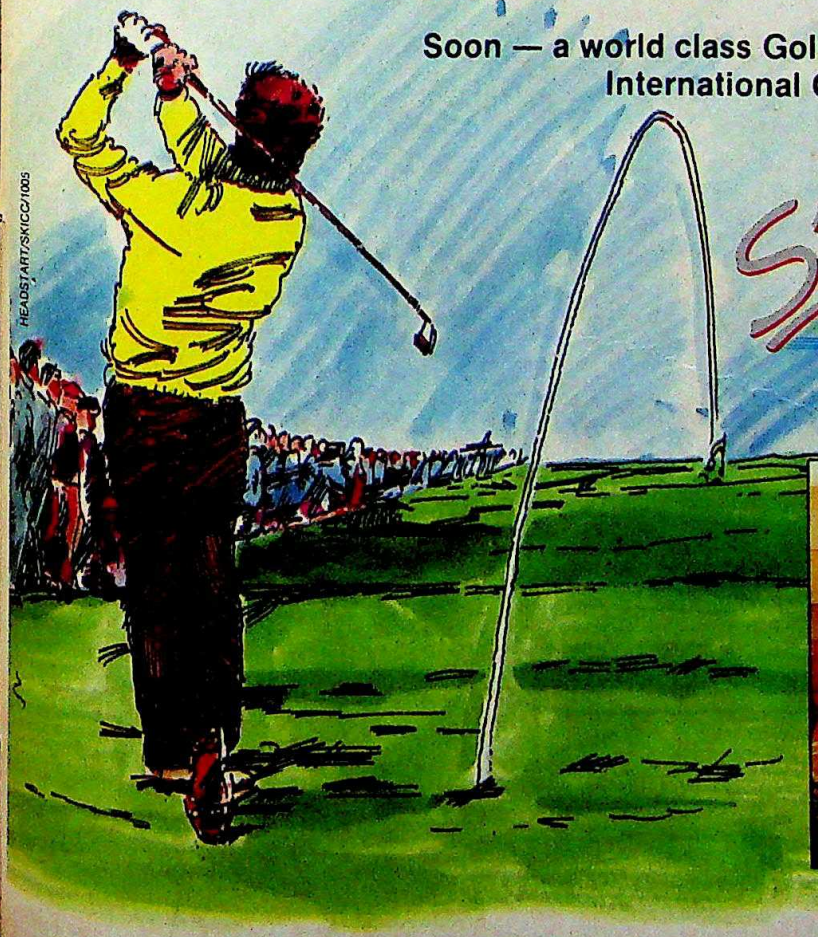

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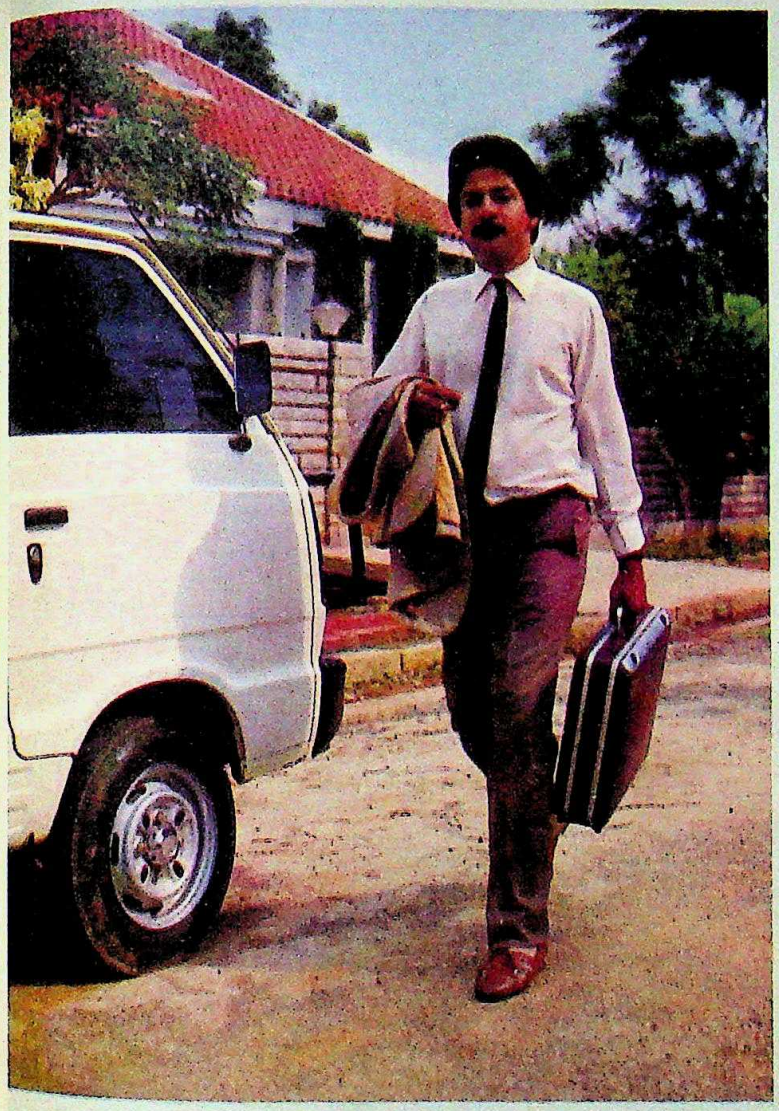

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Major advantages of the AHLSTROM PYROFLOW *CFB system are :

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2/ **Environmental protection against SO_2/NOx emissions**

3/ **Erosion and corrosion of heat transfer surface is avoided**

4/ **Low consumption of bed materials and high heat recovery from bed materials**

5/ **Simplified Fuel Feed System**

6/ **Natural Circulation, no EHE**

7/ **Multi-fuel capability**

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★ Snam Progetti ITALY
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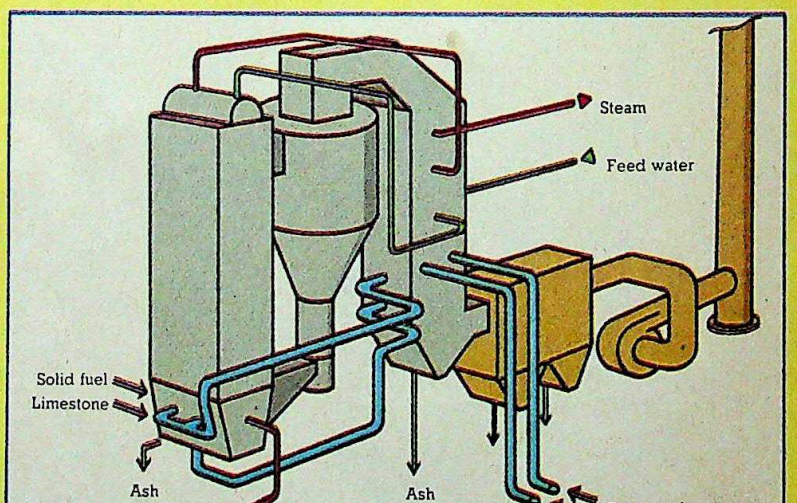
★ Shinko Pyropower Ltd. JAPAN &
★ Isgec John Thompson INDIA

AHLSTROM PYROFLOW



AHLSTROM PYROFLOW PROCESS DIAGRAM

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clear. The Britannia chairman declines to disclose the price he has paid Nabisco, and whether he negotiated separately for each of the four companies or bought them in a package deal. "I will be violating the terms of the agreement if I disclose details," he says. But observers in Bombay speculate that the collective price-tag must have run to well over $100 million (Rs 150 crore). Pillai has bought the four companies in his own name—no investment company is involved.

That still leaves the question of where he got the money from. The banks would have advanced a sizeable chunk of the finances, and Pillai is believed to be a wealthy man. Few of course really know just how wealthy he is. One very limited clue to his financial standing: when he sold a Singapore company he was an equal partner in, it reported sales of Singapore $50 million (roughly Rs 38 crore).

The meteoric rise of the man who pulled off this spectacular coup is not typical of the rags-to-riches stories that corporate folklore is made of. His father Janardhana Pillai is widely regarded as Kerala's cashew king. The family has a flourishing business at Quilon (cashew exports last year: Rs 10 crore).

THE Britannia chairman started off in the family business, and floated a company called Rajmohan Cashews. Soon, Pillai was bitten by the entrepreneurial bug. He struck out on his own, moving to Singapore in the '70s. With a capital of Rs 50 lakh, Pillai launched a successful cashew-based snack food unit. Around that time the American company Standard Brands (now part of the Nabisco group) was hunting for a local partner to set up a joint venture in Singapore. It settled for Pillai, and Twentieth Century-Standard Brands was born. The company specialised in oil roasted nuts and snack foods. The joint venture flourished, and Pillai was asked to set up similar ventures in Hong Kong and Malaysia. He spent the next nine years overseeing the three companies (he had an equity stake in all of them).

In 1985, Pillai hawked his 50 per cent share in the Singapore company and moved from the Far East to a top slot at International Nabisco Brands in London. Here he started the highly successful Nabisco Commodities which, among other things, buys cashew and groundnuts in the global market. In 1986, Pillai was appointed chairman of Britannia, thanks to his Indian connection. Last year, Britannia exported Rs 20 crore worth of cashew to its parent company.

Certainly, these are heavy responsibilities. The two giant operations have reported sales of $500 million (Rs 750 crore) and profits of $31 million (over Rs 46 crore).

Britannia products: steady profits

Britannia has not been able to expand as production of bread and biscuits is reserved for the small sector. Now, the company could diversify further.

Yet Pillai seems to wear the responsibility well. An observer who's worked with him before says admiringly: "In a little less than an hour Rajan can switch from discussing cashew prices in Brazil to the new marketing strategies that are needed in the Nabisco operation in New Zealand. His knowledge of the food business is amazing." Business in fact is his dominant interest, apart from a passion for tennis. He is a close friend of tennis star Vijay Amritraj, with whom he plays the game whenever he can. Amritraj is on the Britannia board. Last year, the Britannia-Amritraj Tennis School was launched in Madras to train promising players. The company funds the school.

Meanwhile, the focus of attention now is what the latest development means for Britannia. It's clearly the largest enterprise in the Rajan Pillai stable, accounting for 66 per cent of his group's sales. Although the other three companies are more profitable, Britannia's profit graphs are not to be poohpoohed either. They have steadily, even if unspectacularly, climbed over the years. Last year, Britannia notched up a net profit of Rs 7.89 crore on sales of Rs 192 crore.

Pillai says he has no immediate plans for the 70-year-old company. Nabisco appointee E.J. Grinstead will continue as managing director (which is perhaps a signal that the American company will continue its relationship with Britannia despite its disinvestment). The peripatetic Pillai will continue his frenetic pace as a senior Nabisco executive, making whistle-stop visits to the companies in his domain (he's usually out of London for half the year). But plans for the company's future may perhaps take shape on his first visit to India as Britannia's owner scheduled for late this fortnight.

In a limited sense, however, Britannia does gain from the Pillai acquisition: it will give up its multinational status. The company's major product lines, bread and biscuits, are reserved for the small sector. As a result, the Government has turned down Britannia's applications to expand production capacities.

While this "anomaly," as Pillai describes it, is unlikely to change with Britannia's new-found status as an Indian company, it can probably move more easily into new areas of business. It already has branched out into soya oil and computer software export, but the pace of diversification may quicken. Says Pillai: "It is premature to talk of diversification. But unlike in the past, the road is now clear for Britannia." And if Pillai's interpretation is right, Britannia will emerge as a company with far more than crunch.

—S.N. VASUKI

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SHIPPING

Buoyant Again

Companies turn the corner

SUDDENLY, the mood in the shipping industry is buoyant again after a 15-year-long worldwide recession. As freight rates soar around the globe, Indian companies are sailing out of the sea of red ink splashed across their balance sheets, furiously chalking out expansion or modernisation plans and queueing up for loans to buy new ships.

"I can smell the boom," says Vasant Sheth, chairman of Great Eastern Shipping. Adds L.M.S. Rajwar, chairman and managing director of the state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI): "The worst is over."

Indeed it is. Some companies are even making money hand over fist. Great Eastern, one of the few companies whose cash registers continued to ring in the shipping slump, is expected to post what Sheth describes as "embarrassingly high" profits this year. Industry flagship SCI (which accounts for 55 per cent of the Indian tonnage) closed its financial year last June with a pre-tax profit of Rs 35 crore on revenues of Rs 650 crore.

Even Larsen & Toubro (L&T) is optimistic. The engineering giant had sunk Rs 90 crore in shipping in 1982, only to be buffeted by the gales of recession. Its shipping division now hopes to turn the corner this year. Tiny Varun Shipping is merrily coasting along. Summing up the position, Dilip De, managing director of Ranadip Shipping, says happily: "There are good times ahead."

That's due to a combine of factors. In a fiercely competitive market, many Indian concerns were wrecked by low freight rates resulting in a much leaner industry—at a time when international oil and commodity markets are booming.

But good times are in store only for those that have weathered the storm. In India, as in the rest of the world, many of yesterday's shipping stars have, quite simply, sunk. Dempo, Salgaocar, Seven Seas have been wound up. A few others are on the bread line. As the venerable Scindia Steamship's lock-out enters the seventh month, its once-bustling head office stands deserted. Scindia is now raising much needed cash by chartering six of its ships to SCI, with a private company providing such support services as shore-based jobs on Scindia's behalf. And talks still continue on putting the company back on an even keel.

These aren't the industry's only problems, of course. SCI, for instance, has a daunting issue on its hands. Its merger with the ailing, state-owned Moghul Line was approved this year. While the Government wrote off most of Moghul's accumulated loss of Rs 120 crore, SCI is stuck with a debt-equity ratio of 1:13 (a more prudent ratio would be 1:6).

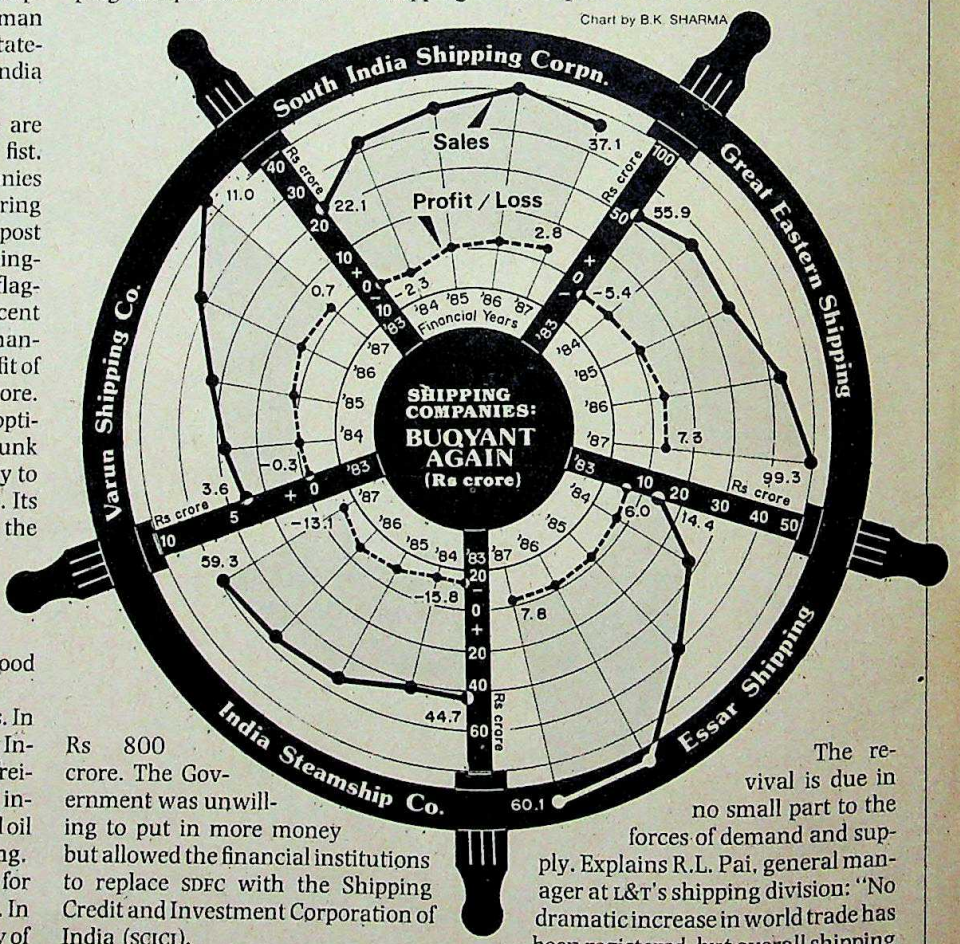
A host of sick shipping companies are also scrambling to raise cash. Two years ago, the Government's Shipping Development Fund Committee (SDFC), which disbursed loans to the industry, had to be dissolved: private shipping companies owed it a whopping Rs 800 crore. The Government was unwilling to put in more money but allowed the financial institutions to replace SDFC with the Shipping Credit and Investment Corporation of India (SCICI).

Its first task was to draw up a list of sick but viable concerns—India Steamship, Nirman Shipping, Damodar Bulk Carriers, Chowgule Steamships. Says SCICI Managing Director N.C. Singhal: "We froze part of the outstanding loans, allowed overdue interest to be converted into equity and gave many companies a fresh financial package." Companies being rehabilitated are showing signs of reviving. But due to huge accumulated losses they still face rough seas.

For all the problems, the industry is undoubtedly in the midst of a business revival (*see chart*). Companies are trying to expand their fleets. Essar Shipping has a Rs 140-crore expansion plan. L&T wants to acquire three bulk carriers at a total cost of Rs 58 crore. Great Eastern proposes to buy six bulk carriers and three offshore supply vessels. SCI is seeking Rs 3,200 crore from the Government for a fleet replacement scheme.

Many private companies are cautiously queueing up before SCICI for funds to buy ships. Last year, it sanctioned Rs 144 crore in loans. In the first six months of this year, the loan figure shot up to Rs 150 crore.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



The revival is due in no small part to the forces of demand and supply. Explains R.L. Pai, general manager at L&T's shipping division: "No dramatic increase in world trade has been registered, but overall shipping capacity has declined. A perfect balance between demand and supply has been achieved."

Supply had outpaced demand. In the past, shipping companies had a reckless appetite for expansion. In 1981, for example, banks freely lent money to companies after some freight rates shot up. Shipping enterprises then went on an expansion spree. Says Dilip De: "Bankers behaved irresponsibly. There was specu-

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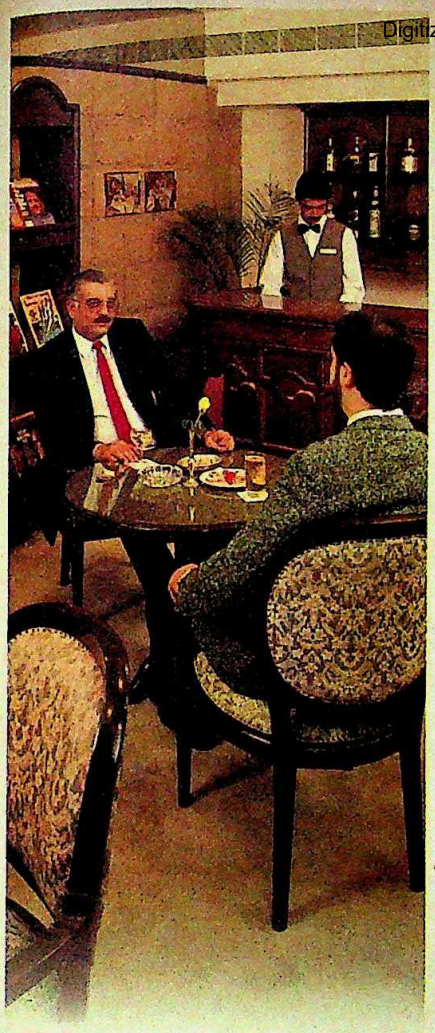

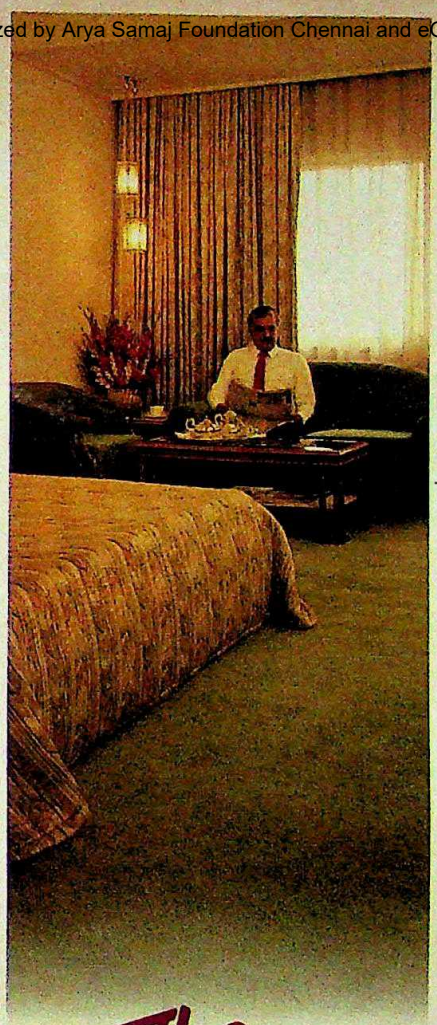

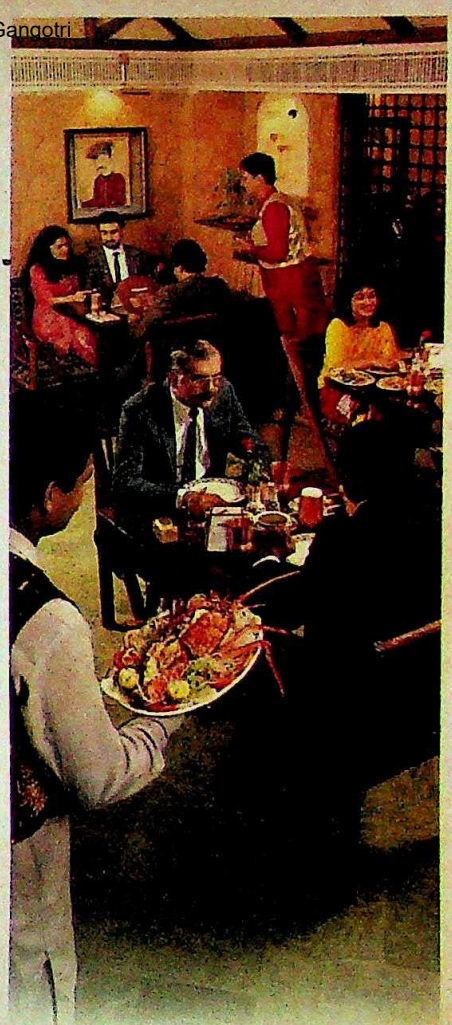

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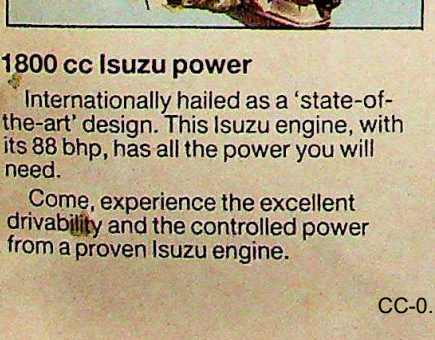

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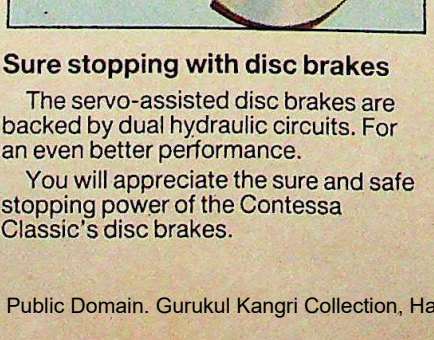

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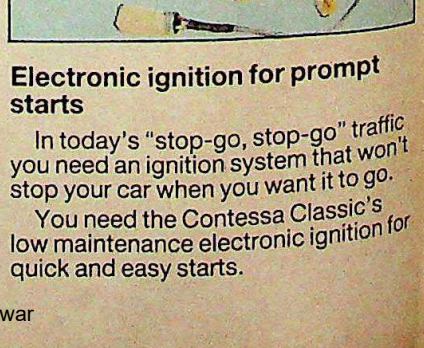

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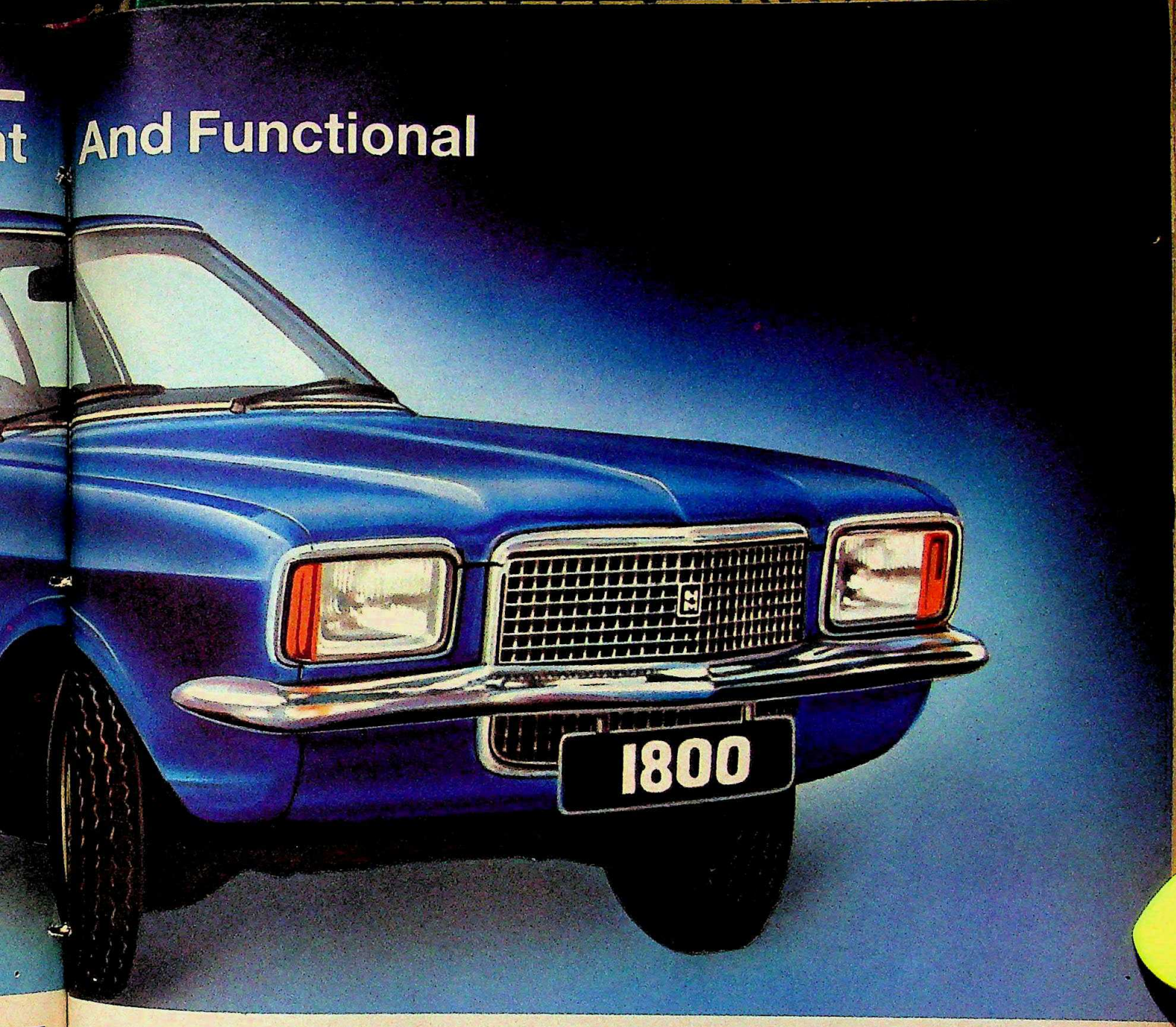

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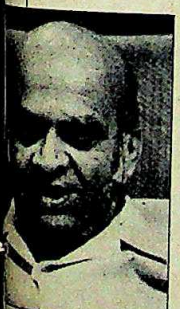
lative buying everywhere. And instead of a possible turn-around, there was a further six years of recession."

The lean years witnessed hot battles for business. In the international container market, some 40 shipping concerns competed in 1984 for a shrinking share of the pie. Inevitably, freight rates crashed. Companies then decided to apportion routes among themselves and formed consortiums for the purpose. The result: freight rates have today climbed by an average of 35 per cent, and nearly doubled in some cases. In 1986, the rate for container cargo from Bombay to Europe was $ 1,000 (about Rs 15,000). In 1988, the rate is $ 1,900 (Rs 28,500).

L.M.S. RAJWAR
Chairman and managing director, SCI

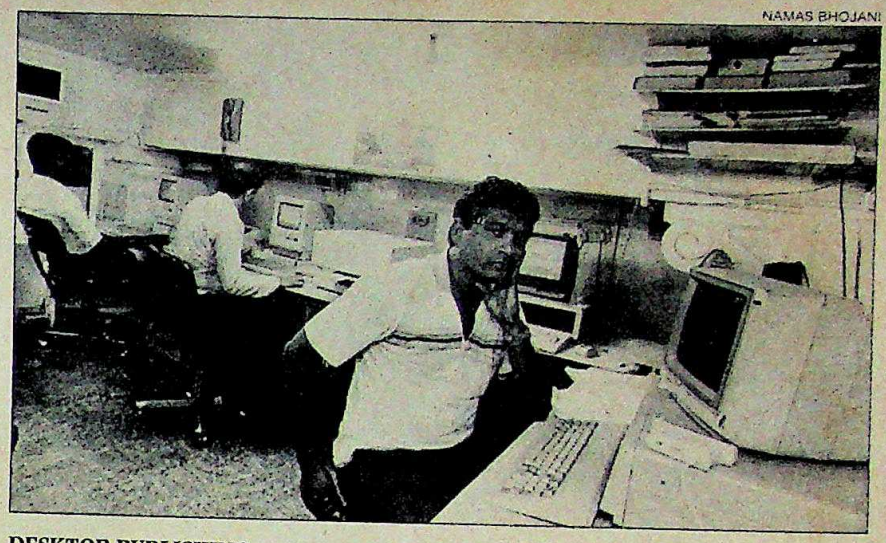


VASANT SHETH
Chairman, Great Eastern Shipping

There are other explanations for the industry's better prospects. With world commodity—copper, tin, wheat—markets booming, dry bulk carriers are in hot demand—at a time when several shipping corporations are scrapping ships. Moreover, many countries have started stocking up on oil in large quantities because they fear that today's low oil prices will move up again.

Still the rise in freight rates hasn't been uniform. It's been very high for dry bulk carriers (a line dominated by private shipping concerns) and moderate for containers and tankers (in which SCI has a virtual monopoly). But Rajwar isn't worried about the relatively sluggish container market. "What's important is that the decline has been arrested," says he. Yet SCI has asked the Government to reserve a substantial portion of Indian container cargo for Indian concerns. "We want cargo support, not price support," says Rajwar.

Shipping company executives are also quick to point out that the industry's future will not be determined by freight rates alone. Shipbuilding capacities at Indian shipyards are primitive, ships carry prohibitive price-tags, the ports are congested and the facilities for quick turn-around of vessels are barely adequate. Clearly, unless the infrastructure is radically pepped up, most of the recent gains will be submerged. —S.N. VASUKI



NAMAS BHOJANI

DTP bureau in Bombay: high-tech

DESKTOP PUBLISHING

A Big Boom

A revolution in printing

IN Bombay's Fort area, Y.N. Prasad runs a small printing shop. A few years ago, all he had was an antiquated photocopier and printer. Business was ho hum—and confined to printing. Today his office boasts two personal computers, two Apple Macintosh machines and a laser printer. Printing has become a sideline. He edits and designs an array of brochures and news-letters on the computer. Business is booming—thanks to desktop publishing (DTP).

Prasad is not the only DTP entrepreneur. Over 45 DTP bureaus (as they're called in trade parlance) have mushroomed in Bombay. In Bangalore, about 20 bureaus have sprung up this year alone. So widespread is the revolution that dingy xerox machine and typewriting centres have got into the act. Says H. Krishnan, who's added a DTP system to his Bangalore-based Set Type Graphics India, a standard phototypesetting unit: "We're looking at exciting times."

The DTP system is simple—a software package that combines phototypesetting and design, operated through a personal computer and a high resolution laser printer. DTP has many advantages. In a conventional system, artwork for printing is created by manually assembling different typeset elements on a page and then laying it out with pictures and diagrams. In DTP, the full page can be assembled on the computer screen as it will finally be printed. Thus, those who're not design or typographical experts can try out different designs before printing the most desirable one.

DTP has become the rage because it is also affordable. Says S. Vasudev, who quit a well-paid advertising job to manage a DTP bureau in Bombay: "The returns are steady and the initial investment of about Rs 2 lakh is not very high." Just how popular this gee whiz system has become is evident from the size of the market. Introduced in India last year, the DTP market is now estimated at Rs 20 crore. And business is booming because DTP has cut customer costs. A Bombay-based foreign bank used to spend Rs 600 per page of its monthly news-letter for designing and printing. With DTP, it pays just Rs 150 per page.

The handful of computer firms that turn out DTP systems also have reason to be pleased. The Bombay-based Abacus Computers, which manufactures only such systems, had sales of Rs 4 crore last year. This year, it expects to double sales, then touch Rs 12 crore next year. "Our aim was to sell systems to the corporate sector," says A.S. Duggal, managing director of Abacus Computers. "But the demand from DTP bureaus and publishing houses came as a big surprise."

Industry watchers believe DTP's future lies in publishing. Already, Abacus has 60 newspapers as its customers, ranging from The Times of India group to *Gomantak Times* in Goa. Zenith Computers has installed a system for the Marathi daily *Sakal*. But can the impressive growth of the first two years be sustained? DTP manufacturers believe it can, if a market that's still confined to the metros expands. Certainly, if hardware prices drop, DTP bureaus may well spring up from Agartala to Arkonam.

—S.N. VASUKI with bureau reports

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THE MARKETS

Stiff Margins

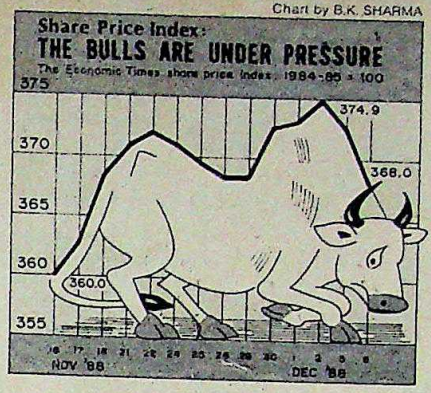
Prices fall in response

IS a stock-market crisis in the offing? The Bombay Stock Exchange authorities at least seem to think so. In a series of swift measures, they've moved to cool what they evidently regard as an overheated market.

Last fortnight, the stock exchange authorities imposed a 20 per cent margin on buyers of 41 shares. The governing board of the stock exchange followed this up by jacking up the daily margins from 20 per cent to 30 per cent. What this meant was that those purchasing these shares would have to fork out 30 per cent of the price immediately (in the stock-market, payments are usually made and shares taken delivery of after a fortnight or even later).

What's more, they slapped a 20 per cent margin for 18 other shares. As a result, 50 of the 76 scrips on the so-called specified list—delivery of shares on this list can be postponed up to 90 days—are subject to these stiff margins.

Chart by B.K. SHARMA



Nor is this all. Earlier, the Bombay Stock Exchange had asked buyers to take delivery of Associated Cement shares on purchasing them. Last fortnight, it directed buyers to pay the full price of shares to the exchange's clearing house by the end of the day. The Calcutta Stock Exchange too slapped a margin of Rs 40 lakh on one broker and a total of Rs 1 crore on 20 other brokers.

Inevitably, share price indices have reacted to the official moves. After touching a new high for the year at 374.9 on December 2, *The Economic Times* price index slumped to 368 four days later. The Bombay Stock Exchange index of 30 share prices too dropped from 698.87 on December 6 to 687.04.

That probably is what the Government wants. It is clearly alarmed by the sharp price uptrend. Said a Finance Ministry official in Delhi: "These are regulatory steps meant to cool the market. Seeing the price increase, many innocent people may enter the market and burn their fingers. The boom can go bust."

The Bombay Stock Exchange wants to trim the volume of trading, but this has made most brokers unhappy: their incomes are tied to the volume of business. They charge the stock exchange with trying to mask its inefficiency. The country's largest exchange has not been able to cope with the sizeable increase in trading, and in fact has had to shut down to clear the pending paper work.

Still, the latest official effort to put the lid on prices may prove to be futile. With more punters heading for the stock-markets, and with stock issues continuing to be heavily oversubscribed (the recent Tata Honeywell issue was oversubscribed 80 times, and the Modi Steel issue was oversubscribed 30 times), share prices can only go one way—up.

ACTIVE STOCKS

	1988 HIGH	LOW	CLOSE 6.12.88	Change in Fortnight
Ashok Leyland	71.00	30.25	68.50	2.00 –
Associated Cement	425.00	128.50	407.50	16.50 +*
Atlas Copco	66.00	33.50	52.00	3.00 –
Asian Paints	232.50	128.75	217.50	10.00 –
Bajaj Auto	520.00	187.50	407.50	2.50 –
Baroda Rayon	385.00	140.00	355.00	15.00 –
Bata India	89.00	50.50	86.00	1.00 –
Bharat Forge	205.00	101.00	203.75	8.75 +
Birla Jute	58.50	32.25	56.50	3.00 +
Blow Plast	125.00	28.00	47.50	0.50 +
Bombay Dyeing	159.50	94.00	133.50	5.00 –
Brooke Bond	122.00	75.00	112.00	4.00 –
Britannia Ind.	121.00	75.00	117.00	5.00 +
Century Spinning	1535.00	617.50	1400.00	80.00 –
Chloride India	83.00	59.00	75.00	5.00 –
Colgate	335.00	160.00	307.50	12.50 –
Cyanamid	72.50	33.00	65.00	1.00 +
DCM	55.00	28.00	35.50	0.25 –
Dunlop	107.00	66.00	101.75	4.75 +
E.I. Hotels	65.00	38.00	57.50	2.50 –
Escorts	82.50	37.00	77.00	9.00 +
Finolex Cables	435.00	237.50	363.75	16.25 –
Food Specialities	178.75	93.50	170.00	5.00 –
Garware Nylon	56.00	20.00	48.00	1.00 +
G.E. Shipping	46.25	20.50	42.75	0.25 –
Gujarat St Fertilisers	173.75	75.00	160.00	2.50 +*
Grasim Ind.	118.00	74.00	83.00	7.000 –
Hind. Ciba	691.00	332.50	640.00	20.00 –
Hind. Cocoa	215.00	67.50	116.25	10.00 –
Hindustan Lever	92.00	59.50	78.00	6.00 –**
Hindustan Motors	34.00	15.80	31.25	0.65 +
Hind. Aluminium	148.00	73.00	146.00	9.00 +
IEL	59.50	31.00	55.50	1.50 +
Indian Organic	51.00	15.00	45.00	3.00 –
Indian Rayon	93.00	46.00	87.00	1.00 –
Indrol	291.25	133.75	250.00	15.00 –**
Ingersoll-Rand	370.00	205.00	335.00	10.00 +
ITC	64.00	30.00	52.00	3.50 +
J.K. Synthetics	94.00	45.50	88.50	2.50 –
Kinetic Engineering	410.00	161.25	372.50	30.00 +
Kirloskar Cummins	100.00	48.00	85.00	15.00 –
KSB Pumps	425.00	215.00	325.00	nil
Larsen & Toubro	148.50	75.50	128.00	4.50 –
Lipton	84.00	52.00	77.00	5.00 –
LML Ltd.	20.00	9.00	15.50	0.50 +
Madura Coats	95.00	59.00	93.50	1.50 –
Mahindra & Mahindra	124.00	48.50	116.00	1.50 –
Milk Food	290.00	72.50	243.00	nil
Motor Industries	700.00	447.50	610.00	40.00 –
Mukand Iron	139.00	72.50	133.00	5.00 +
National Organic	990.00	390.00	895.00	40.00 –
Nirlon	16.00	5.00	15.00	2.00 +
Orkay Silk Mills	51.00	17.00	35.00	9.00 –**
Peico Electronics	40.00	24.50	33.50	nil
Pfizer	90.00	50.00	77.00	9.00 –
Premier Auto	58.00	23.00	53.25	2.25 –
Ranbaxy	120.00	68.00	82.50	2.50 –
Raymond	96.00	41.50	69.00	2.00 +
Reliance Industries	231.00	69.00	155.00	18.50 –
Shaw Wallace	132.00	50.50	92.00	5.00 +**
Shriram Fibres	67.00	32.50	66.00	1.50 +
SKF Bearings	2420.00	1058.00	2180.00	170.00 –***
Siemens India	116.00	56.00	98.00	5.00 –
SPIC	68.00	23.50	60.00	5.50 –
Tata Steel	1100.00	568.75	1071.25	6.25 –
Telco	785.00	340.00	740.00	22.50 –
Voltas	580.00	225.00	510.00	20.00 –
Wimco	30.75	11.00	29.00	1.50 +
Vam Organic	143.00	75.00	130.00	4.00 +
Videocon Int.	73.75	18.00	70.00	10.00 +

*Spot delivery **Ex-dividend ***Ex-right

WORLD VALUE OF RUPEE

COUNTRY	CURRENCY	UNIT	TT Selling Rates Rs	TT Buying Rates Rs
Australia	Dollar	1	13.2102	13.0741
Austria	Schilling	100	1.2435	1.2284
Bahrain	Dinar	1	39.9826	39.6826
Bangladesh	Taka	100	48.2620	48.1120
Canada	Dollar	1	12.7025	12.5740
Denmark	Kroner	1	2.2667	2.2421
Egypt	Pound	1	6.6992	6.6126
France	Franc	1	2.5974	2.5316
Hong Kong	Dollar	1	1.9325	1.9135
Indonesia	Rupiah	100	0.0860	0.0800
Iran	Rial	100	22.4122	22.3560
Italy	Lira	100	1.1726	1.1222
Japan	Yen	100	12.5786	12.2699
Kenya	Shilling	1	0.8199	0.7500
Kuwait	Dinar	1	53.8526	53.7620
Malaysia	Dollar	1	5.6262	5.5702
Mauritius	Rupee	1	1.1226	1.0785
Nepal	Rupee	1	0.6300	0.6100
Netherlands	Guilder	1	7.7469	7.6638
Pakistan	Rupee	1	0.8099	0.7900
Singapore	Dollar	1	7.7396	7.6816
Spain	Peseta	1	0.1320	0.1100
Sri Lanka	Rupee	1	0.4600	0.4400
Sweden	Kroner	1	2.5131	2.4526
Switzerland	Franc	1	10.4265	10.3182
Tanzania	Shilling	1	0.1240	0.1000
Thailand	Baht	100	59.9820	59.7026
UK	Pound	1	28.0308	27.8862
USA	Dollar	1	15.0716	14.9254
UAE	Dirham	1	4.0000	3.9000
USSR	Rouble	1	19.9826	19.8020
W. Germany	Deutschmark	1	8.8652	8.6430

These rates were supplied by The Bank of Tokyo Limited, New Delhi and quoted between the banks on 7.12.88 .

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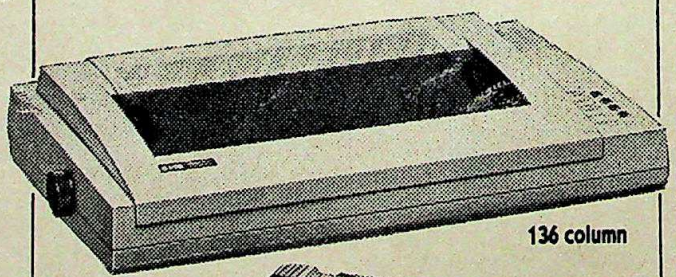

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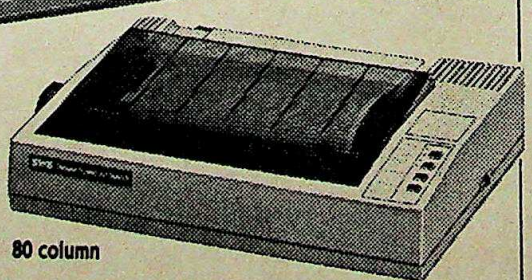

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THE EDGE IN COMPUTER PRINTERS

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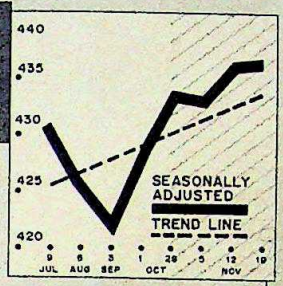
INFLATION hit the economy despite good monsoons and bumper harvests. Stock-market optimism may be unwarranted. There is concern about how long the bubble will last. The fall in industrial output last month is worrying. It is not clear if the drop is temporary or a symptom of a more serious problem. Money supply and credit growth are a little over target levels and may be adding to inflationary pressures.

All data are seasonally adjusted. Current trends are computed on the basis of six months' (weekly data) or two years' (monthly data) figures.

Wholesale Price Index

1970-71 = 100

Current Trend
1.5% p.a.

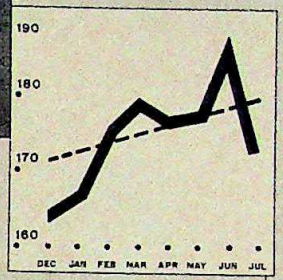


Instead of falling at this time of the year, prices rose at a disconcertingly high rate during the last fortnight.

Industrial Production Index

1980-81 = 100

Current Trend
8.1% p.a.

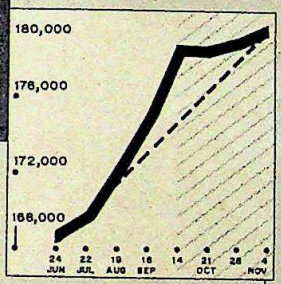


Industrial production dropped sharply last month though the long-term trend remains good.

Money Supply

Rs Crore

Current Trend
17.6% p.a.

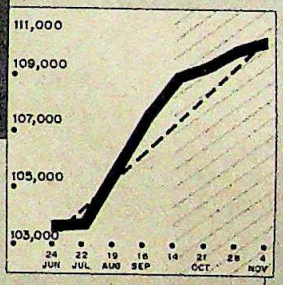


The supply of money in the economy increased last fortnight and the long-term trend is higher than target.

Commercial Bank Credit

Rs Crore

Current Trend
18.4% p.a.

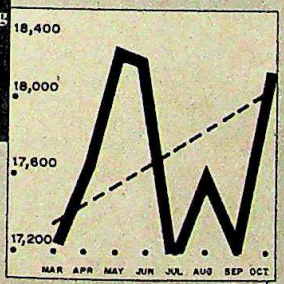


Commercial credit grew last fortnight—the long-term trend may now be too expansionary and lead to inflationary pressures.

Manufacturing Index

1980-81

Current Trend
8.6% p.a.

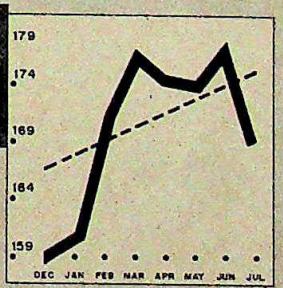


The most worrying aspect of the economy was the decline in the manufacturing sector. There was a drop in output last month.

Electricity Generation

Million kwh

Current Trend
6.7% p.a.

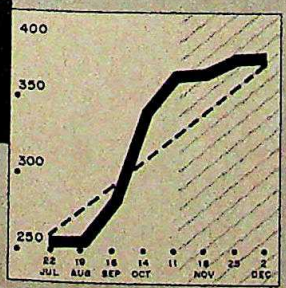


Electric power output went up sharply last month thereby helping to eliminate bottlenecks in the economy.

Share Price Index

1984-85 = 100

Current Trend
97.6% p.a.

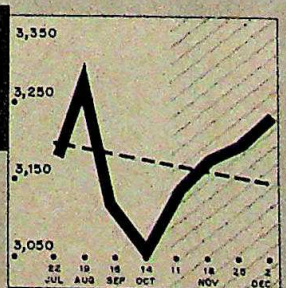


Share prices continue to boom despite the fact that underlying fundamentals do not seem to warrant it.

Closing Gold Prices

Rs per 10 gm

Current Trend
4.1% p.a.



The price of gold registered an increase during the last fortnight after a relatively long period of stability.

WHOLESALE PRICES

Growth of items in the Ist fortnight of November 1988

	% Growth
Wheat	17.30
Solvent Extracted Oil	9.15
Betel-Nuts	5.70
Groundnut Oil	5.52
Bananas	3.52
Coffee	3.40
Groundnut Seeds	2.94
Urad	2.88
Gur	2.57
Cotton Seeds	2.45
Cars	2.41
Oranges	2.40
Jowar	2.34
Art Silk and Artificial Fabrics	2.29
Milk	2.28
Tapioca	2.21
Ghee	2.17
Khandsari	2.09
Ragi	1.93
Tea	1.92
Barley	1.79
Silk Raw	1.46
Rice	1.43
Logs Timber Bamboo	1.42
Maize	1.29
Rubber	1.28
Coal	1.11
Synthetic Fibres	1.10
Polythene Moulding Powder	1.05
Board	0.99
Machine Tools	0.96
Cigarettes	0.89
Furnace Oil	0.84
Silk & Artificial Fabrics	0.84
Skelp	0.82
Jute Textiles	0.82
PVC Compounds	0.79
Soda Ash	0.79
Steel Structurals	0.76
Limestone	0.76
Diesel Oil	0.74
Cotton Yarn	0.74
Woollen Cloth & Woollen Khadi	0.70
Tobacco Raw	0.68
Iron Ore	0.68
Tubes	0.65

Of the 138 series considered 86 of them with a total weight of 63.859 had a positive growth and 52 of them with a total weight of 24.339 had a negative growth.

SELECTED INDICATORS

	1988	1987
Fertilisers		
Thousand Tonnes, October	8224	556.4
Electricity Generated		
Million. kwh, October	18290	16669
Thermal Plant Load Factor		
Per cent, October	49.0	55.9
Revenue Earning Goods Traffic		
Million Tonnes, October	25.31	24.16
Rail Movement		
Net Tonnes Km., October	17834	19000

Compiled by THE POLICY GROUP

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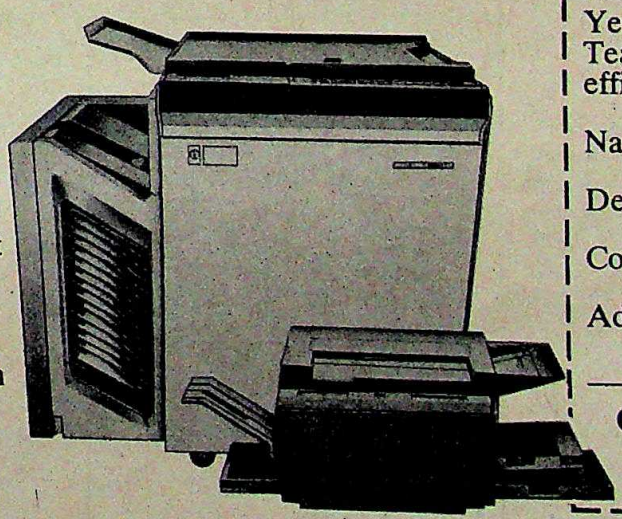

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PTI

Benazir being sworn in as prime minister

PAKISTAN

Limited Options

Prime Minister Benazir prepares for real problems

As a beaming Benazir Bhutto, 35, took the oath as prime minister of Pakistan, the packed reception hall of the Presidency in Islamabad resounded with spontaneous shouts of *jeay Bhutto* and *Bhutto zinda hai*. But there were also some embarrassed figures present, including President Ghulam Ishaq Khan and the generals who had been closely associated with General Zia-ul-Haq, the man who executed Bhutto.

Benazir's accession to power marked the culmination of her family's 11-year struggle against military rule. Yet, ironically, despite her party's victory Benazir had to still wait for the final nod from the generals. The nod came, but not before Benazir had been forced to make some vital concessions: continuity in important policy matters, support for Ishaq Khan, no reduction in the defence budget and the retention of Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, the architect of Zia's foreign policy and a former general, as the foreign minister.

Benazir thus won the first round after conceding some ground, but the challenges before her now seem far greater than those she faced during her crusade against Zia's military rule. With the exception of Yaqub Khan, young lawyer and now Minister for Interior, Law and Justice Altzaz Ahsan and former intelligence chief Rao Rashid, her government is rather inexperienced. It also has to carry the albatross of a slim majority in the National Assembly. In this situation Benazir seems to be relying basically on the bureaucracy, and appears confident that gradually things will improve.

Moreover, Benazir has inherited a dwindling economy, a strife-torn society and a rapidly changing geo-political situation. Worst of all, while the expectations of the people, politically suppressed under the long and harsh military rule are high, she is bound by a constitution which was essentially devised for the perpetuation of one-man rule. The present constitution, which came into force in 1985, has concentrated an immense amount of power in the hands of the President.

Her problems, not minuscule by any reckoning, are exacerbated by the fact that the Senate, which enjoys almost the same powers as the National Assembly, is dominated by the Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA). Fresh elections to the Senate are not due until 1992 and the IDA could effectively block the path of new legislation till then.

The task before her is made particularly daunting by the fact that her main rival Mian Nawaz Sharif, a Zia protege, is firmly saddled in Punjab where political power has traditionally been concentrated and from where the bulk of the armed forces is recruited. Punjab has already become a political testing ground for the fledgling Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Government.

While comfortably placed in the remaining three provinces, the PPP received a major setback in the Punjab which was traditionally considered its strongest political base. Now Benazir loudly accuses Nawaz Sharif's caretaker provincial government of selective rigging.

Sharif is retaliating in kind. He is whipping up Punjabi sub-nationalism by dubbing the PPP as a Sindhi nationalist organisation. The confrontation between Islamabad and Lahore is already vicious. "Punjab is not a personal fiefdom of anybody," warns Benazir. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif has charged the Central Government with attempting to destabilise the IDA Government in the Punjab. In the same vein, Benazir's appointment of retired General Tikka Khan, the secretary general of the PPP, as the governor of the Punjab is a provocative act.

But Benazir can only go thus far and no more. She has to live with the discomfiting realisation that while the continued existence of the Nawaz Sharif Government could effectively undermine her government, any attempt to topple him would create severe complications by strengthening Punjabi sub-nationalism.

All this leaves Benazir on a particularly sticky wicket vis-a-vis the army. If the Bhutto legacy is her strongest asset the long legacy of the generals, Ayub, Yahya and Zia ruling the country with an iron hand is her most formidable challenge. The military, which has remained a major shareholder in power throughout Pakistan's 41-year history has, to all outward appearances, retreated from politics. But the shadow of

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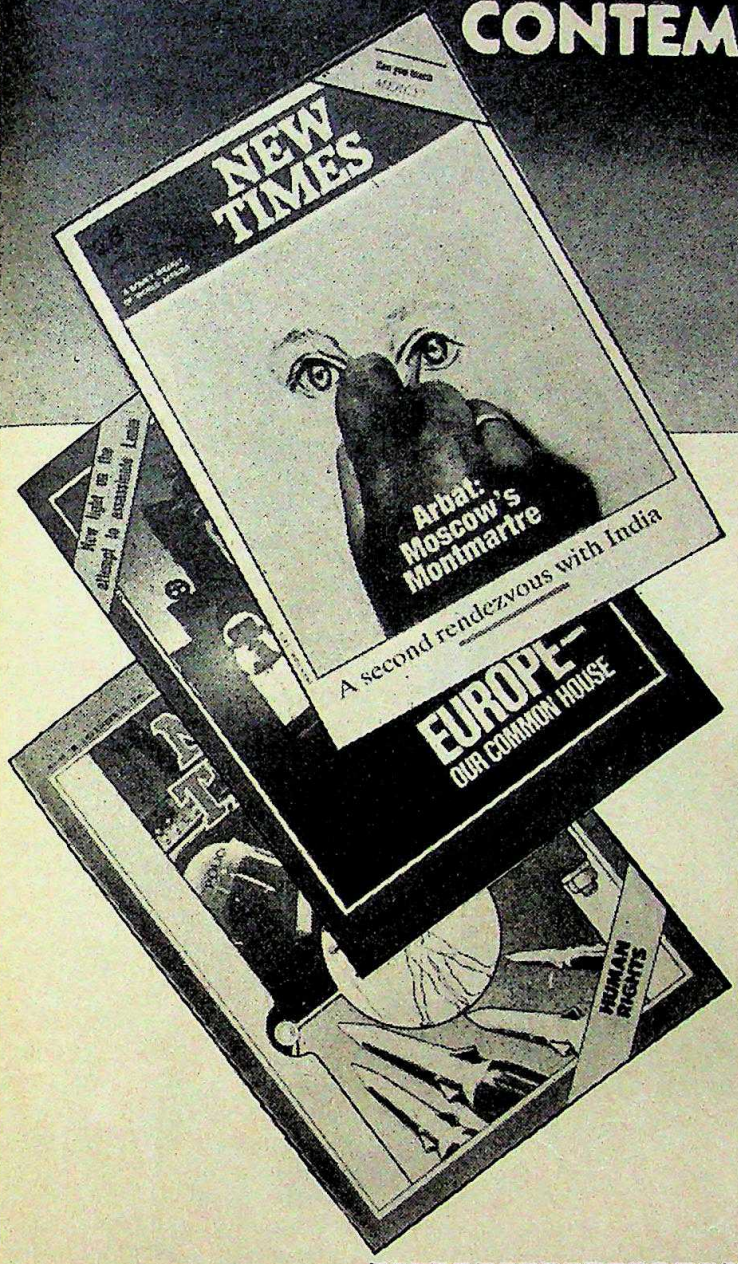
LIVING INTEREST IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD



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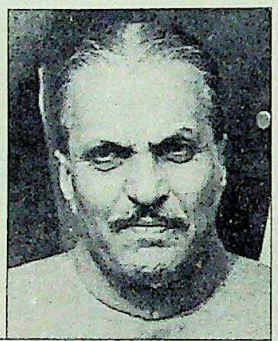
khaki still clouds the Pakistani political scene. "The most significant political constraints arise from the military's continuing influence over the country's policy," says Maleeha Lodhi, the articulate editor of the Islamabad-based daily, *The Muslim*. "The new Government's moves will be closely watched by the military especially in the areas of defence, foreign policy and internal security."

Lodhi's predecessor, now well-known syndicated columnist, Mushahid Hussain also shares the realism saying: "Given the fact that Pakistan has been ruled by the armed forces for the greater part of its history, the area of civil-military relations is important for strengthening a democratic civil government."

Ayub Khan

Yahya Khan



Zia-ul-Haq

Lacking the majority to change Zia's constitution Benazir has to compromise with the army. Ruthless generals have dominated Pakistani politics and the army may not retreat to the barracks quietly.

Compared to her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who took over power after the political clout of the armed forces had been weakened substantially as a result of the humiliating defeat it suffered in Bangladesh, the task before Benazir is much more difficult. "The Government will have to tread cautiously to ensure military subordination to the civil democratic government," points out an analyst.

Apart from political problems the new Government is confronted with a formidable economic crisis. The arbitrary monetary and fiscal policies of the previous government have landed the country on the verge of bankruptcy, and have imposed severe constraints on the Benazir Government's ability to institute any substantial reform. For the last several years the Government has been unable to meet even its current expenditure through its own revenue, and the budgetary deficit has already reached alarming proportions. In order to bridge this gap the military Government in the past simply resorted to heavy internal and external borrowing.

As a result Pakistan is currently paying US $ 1.2 billion in debt servicing alone. Over the past few years the Government has engaged in short-term borrowing in order to meet its long-term debt servicing obligations. "The result is a large accumulation of potentially volatile short-term external liabilities," points out Dr Akmal Hussain, a prominent economist.

To make matters worse Dr Mehboob-ul-Haq, the former finance minister, had signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), for a billion-dollar loan just a few weeks before the elections. The IMF granted the loan but stipulated stringent conditions, including removal of subsidies, increase in prices and a broadening of the existing tax structure. The implementation of these policy requirements could well create serious and widespread discontent particularly among the poorer sections of the population. But in any case all populist measures are completely ruled out. And with foreign exchange reserves sufficient only for a week's imports, Benazir Bhutto seems to have no other option but to abide by the terms of the agreement. "There is nothing we can do," she maintains, "the whole system, a legacy of General Zia is loaded against the PPP."

On the external front Benazir will have to deal with the Afghan issue at its final and most crucial stage. Although she has pledged to continue the Afghan policy formulated by her predecessors, she will be faced with a changed situation as the pullout of the Russian troops from Afghanistan will be completed by February 1989. The major choice before the new administration is whether to continue providing arms to the Afghan Mujahideen operating from Pakistan or to help pave the way for a broadbased government in Kabul. While it has no choice but to go along with the old policy it may be unhappy to pay the price for it. According to observers the continued arms supply to the Mujahideen could have severe repercussions, including intensified terror bombings inside Pakistan.

Benazir has so far refrained from committing herself to any position on this. Meanwhile, she has firmly stated that there will not be any shift in the foreign policy of the country and that her government will continue to maintain strong ties with Washington. However, her tilt towards the US may again evoke sharp reactions from the left wing of her party. She seems to lay special emphasis on Pakistan's relations with India and other neighbouring countries. The SAARC summit meeting in the last week of December will provide her with an opportunity to have a dialogue with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on bilateral issues. She has, of course, made it very clear that the relations with India must be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality.

Benazir is faced with the most daunting task of strengthening the democratic set-up in a very adverse political and economic atmosphere. The restoration of democratic rule in the country after a gap of over 11 years has definitely kindled new hope among the people. Her abolishing the government controlled Pakistan National Press Trust which controls eight major newspapers in the country and lifting of the ban on student and trade unions has been widely welcomed. However, in order to tackle the bigger challenges that emerge as she goes along reshaping the destiny of an optimistic nation, she will need to draw upon all the qualities of courage, tenacity and political pragmatism that brought her to power despite overwhelming odds.

—ZAHID HUSSAIN

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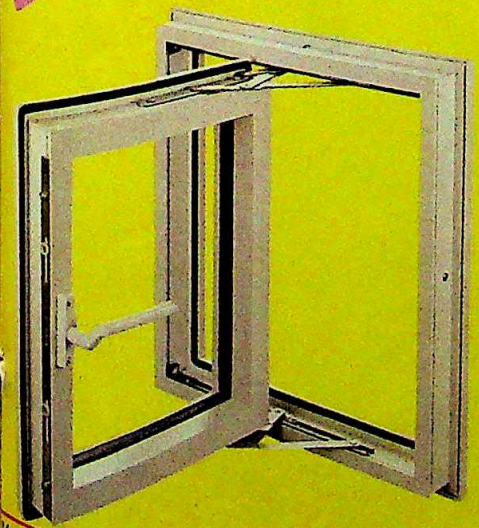

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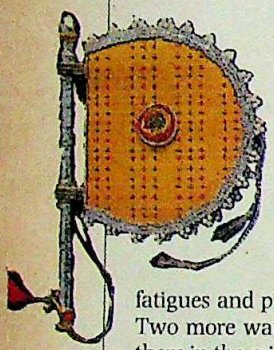
WEDDINGS

The Mad World of Mega Marriages

Fantasy, hi-tech and money make for a bizarre scenario

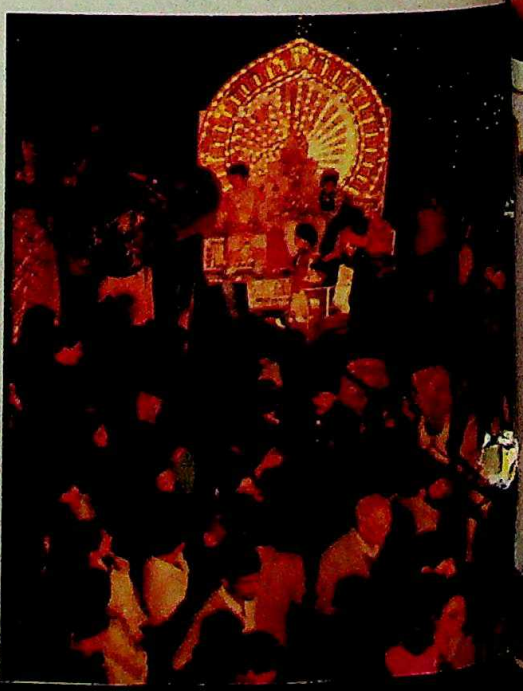


IT could be a bit of a wet experience. Once past the waterfall and you are in a technicolor jungle. A stream murmurs by. Twigs and bamboo crackle underfoot. Sounds of the jungle invade the ears. Exotic birds fly overhead, animals stalk the terrain. Men in fatigues and pith helmets pass by silently. Two more waterfalls cascade gently. And there in the midst of it all is a huge *machan*. Inside sit a man and a woman. Tarzan and Jane? Well, not exactly. Tarzan doesn't *kreegah* his way swinging from tree to tree. And Jane is fully dressed. And coy. The lord of the jungle is getting married. This is marriage—Indian style.

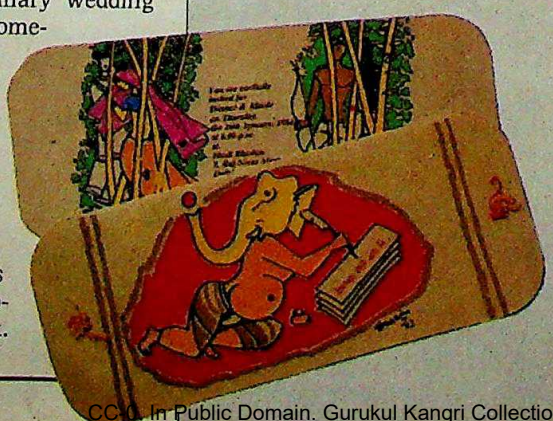
Weddings are no longer what they used to be. The Great Indian Dream is now conjured by fantasy and propelled by technology—and, of course, bottomless purses. The Cecil B. de Mille lurking in many urban Indians has come out of the closet. Parents now design weddings as movie moghuls do their grand productions. Currently in vogue is the Rajput Royal, with elephants, camels, arabesque turbans and intimations of Jodhpur nights in plaster of Paris forts. And the Arabian Nights wedding with sworded sheikhs and belly dancers. There's a Midsummer Night's Dream which Shakespeare could not have dreamed of. There are even the Government of India-inspired *Apna Utsav* marriages. Japanese style weddings too. Not to forget those jungles and waterfalls. "Nobody wants an ordinary wedding anymore. They want something out of this world, exclusive," says Gita Khanna, banquet manager of Delhi's Maurya Sheraton.

So marriage-makers now delve into books and films to find raw material for the dream weddings Keeping up with unstoppered fantasy is hard work. Take the jungle wedding. New Delhi's Hyatt Regency Hotel sent sound recordists to the zoo to record animal sounds. They also gathered the birds—and kept fingers crossed that they would not garnish the buffet below. "We couldn't bring animals into the hotel. So we ordered those cuddly tigers," says Richard Steadman, the hotel's food and beverages consultant.

Food used to be the main concern at marriages. Today, the decor or "ambiance" in wedding parlance, is getting to be as important. Thus the new guest at



(Clockwise) Wild West waiters; chariots of neon; painterly invitations: flights of fantasy



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affluent Indian weddings is Alladin—gleefully rubbing his magic lamp. The only difference is that the lamp is now a strobe light.

And as if conspicuous consumption weren't enough, the urban Indian wedding now increasingly resembles a set for Star Wars. Tunnels of gold, revolving stages, double-storied shamianas crafted by nimble-fingered men from Calcutta (first floor for the religious ceremony; the second for a different kind of spirit) which dwarf the buildings around them, glittering ceilings dripping with real chandeliers, electronic gimmickry, and silver-coloured phaetons with lotus crests.

The flights of fancy are fuelled by the urge to be different. Exclusivity is at such high premium that the super-rich, especially the Marwaris, fly in designers like Babu Rao Patel from Ahmedabad to "conceptualise" weddings in the family. Patel spends most of the wedding season on the road with his movable design board. Some of his clients, shades of Shah Jehan, want the models for the weddings destroyed and insist their themes never be used again.

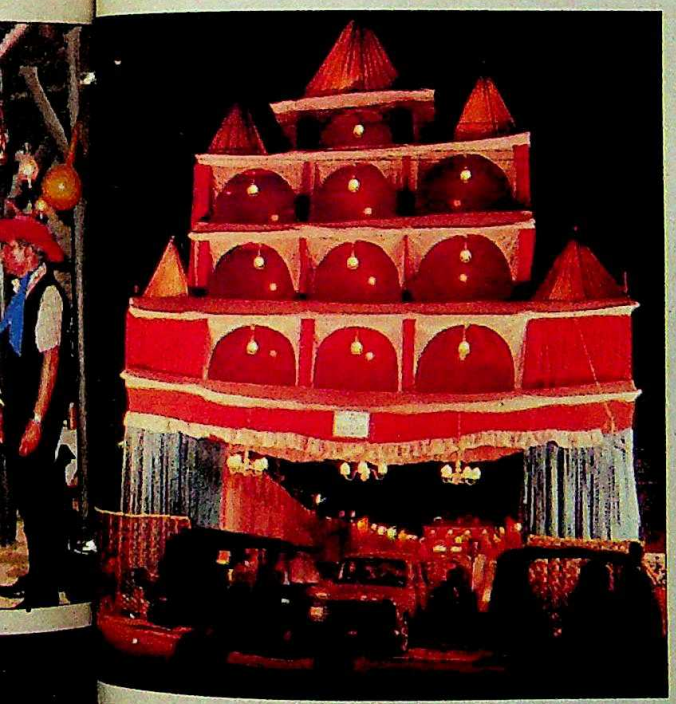
FANTASY has a million faces. Consider the portly Delhi gentleman who wanted to send somebody to Washington D.C. to see the fireworks over the Potomac river on July 4, simply because he wanted it repeated at his daughter's wedding. Or the wedding on the farm when fireworks shot into the sky—in imitation of the spectacular finale to the Soviet festival's closing ceremony—and shone in the distant sky like rainbow stars. And the couple who wanted a wooden bridge built across the swimming pool of a hotel so that the two Cinderella-style horse-drawn carriages (six steeds each) would stop in the middle and they could descend from their respective carriages to garland each other. Or the television magnate who sent out miniature clocks shaped like TV sets which flashed the names of the bride and bridegroom in place of the traditional wedding invitation cards.

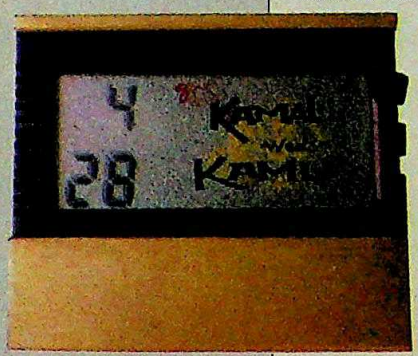
Themes are the in thing. And when the themes run out, there is the entire spectrum of colours to turn on the fantasy. During a recent wedding at the Taj Mahal Hotel in New Delhi, the theme was pink. There were pink trees with pink ribbons, on which hung pink boxes of chocolates. And pink heart-shaped balloons went up to herald the couple. The rhapsody in pink was imported from Europe—the inspiration was a film which had a similar birthday sequence.

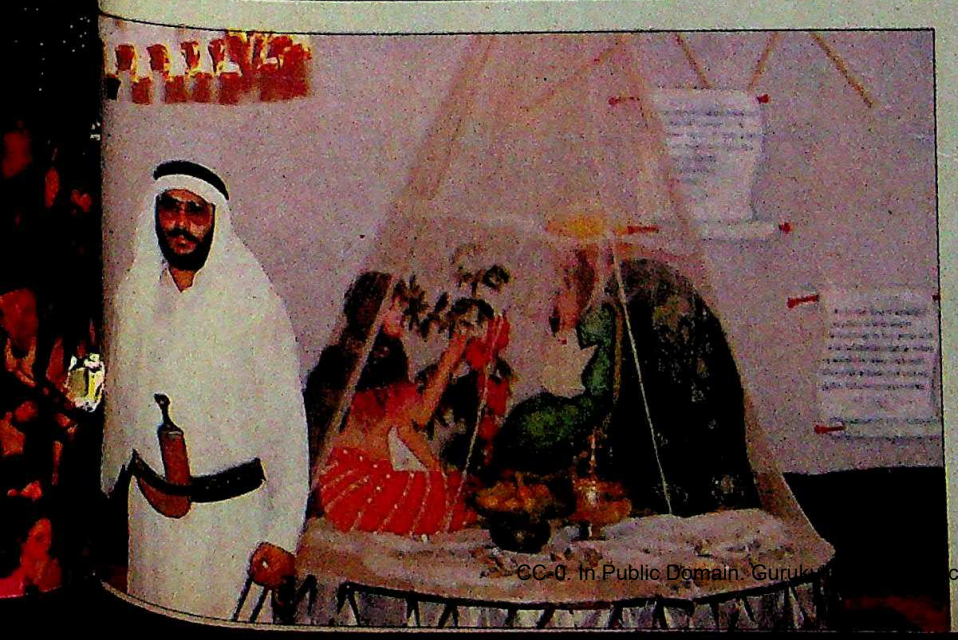
The old-rich still favour the traditional. But the outsize traditional. No longer will the two gilded throne-like chairs do. It has to be a throne: the bride and groom are regally ensconced on a king-size Moghul *takht* with gold-embroidered cushions and other royal accessories. At Delhi's Le Meridien Hotel recently a 14-ft Ganesh made of flowers towered over the wedding guests. More down to earth is the 300-yard-long tunnel of rajnigandhas through which the guests made their way for a wedding at the Ashok Hotel. Fragrance isn't cheap: the tab, Rs 2.5 lakh. It has, in fact, become almost routine for families to fly in orchids from Hong Kong or Bangkok. Some even order tulips from Holland.

Illusion and money have also whisked wedding guests into the Arabian Nights. Maurya Hotel recreated a thousand and one nights—Alf Layla wa Layla—for the wedding of a Delhi contractor's son. A lone, glamorously-attired camel snorted rather gently in the lobby of the hotel in front of a tent bordered by palm trees. Beyond the tent lay a tinsel town confection of the Arabian Nights: Sindbad the sailor under an electric blue, twinkly sky; his friend being swallowed by a serpent.

Juxtaposed with the *trompe-l'oeil* cardboard Arabian Nights, was a live Egyptian belly dancer to make the scene more authentic—and yellow satin-uniformed waiters dressed like Hollywood sheikhs. Even the family members and guests had







A Hawa Mahal shamiana; electronic clock invitation; Arabian Nights Theme

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come as Arabian knights.

At this wedding fantasy was not just to be seen but also to be tasted. Vine leaves, dates and baklavas were flown in from the Middle East while whole lambs were served with biryani in massive containers, placed under elaborate canopies. The trend now is "multi-cuisine, with all kinds of demands such as Japanese dishes," according to K.B. Kachru, ITDC vice-president. It can be around the world in 121 dishes as was the case for the recent Delhi wedding of the son of a Non-resident Indian (NRI) shipping tycoon.

Fantasy was also eaten recently at a "Spanish Evening" engagement party as couples sat cosily in lovers' arbours and plucked some of the hundred kilos of grapes which hung enticingly above them. Themes are played out to the end: at the entrance to a farm the guests sat in horse-drawn buggies with a man strumming a Spanish guitar serenading them all the way to the vineyard bar.

What happened to change the traditional Indian wedding into an electronic fairyland? Hotels were the catalyst. The competition which followed the mushrooming of five-star hotels in 1982 was cut throat. Since innovation in food was limited, some began to concentrate on the decor: fantasy had the sky as the limit. And by the mid-'80s, most hotels were offering theme weddings. Vive la difference was the motto.

Says Rabindra Seth, formerly with ITDC and the Taj Group of Hotels: "It is so much more convenient. Barring finding the bride or the groom, we do it all. From finding the pundit to the right dates." They even do more. Seth once stood in as the groom's father: an Englishman who married an Indian girl needed somebody to stand in as his father.

Earlier, ceremonies such as the roka (the first stop of the wedding train when a couple decides to marry—or their parents decide for them), the engagement, the mehndi ceremony (when the bride's hands are decorated with henna), were a family affair attended by a few friends. Today, these have become public occasions—often grand affairs performed in hotels. What was done in a day's work in somebody's house is now spread over a week in hotels.

But equally suddenly, hotel weddings became a bit infra dig for the super-rich. What had started within the hotel moved out into the homes. And the hotels began to cater to weddings at home. In fact, the Maurya has stopped doing the actual wedding, as will the Taj soon. The new scene is the farmhouse: if you don't have one, beg, borrow or steal one. The sky here is the limit. And the animals can be real. Elephants, camels and horses have now found employment.

THE orgy of excess is not simply the public display of black money; it is also a public expression of private fantasy. The most blatant examples of the new exhibitionism are manifest in Delhi with its ever-burgeoning nouveau riche, the growing tribe of NRIs who descend in swarms during the nuptial season. Neither money nor ideas has a limit.

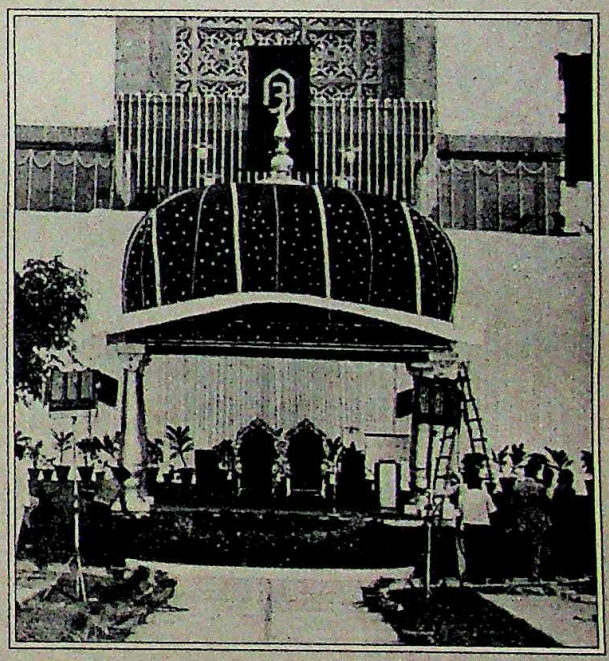
The keeping-up-with-the-Jains syndrome sinks to pretty low depths further down the money ladder. One of Bombay's well-known wedding conjurers, who wants to remain anonymous, says scathingly: "At a certain level, it becomes an ego trip. If a business rival or even his own brother had 10,000 lights on trees for his son, he wants double the amount of lights—even if there are not enough trees in the garden to take the lights."

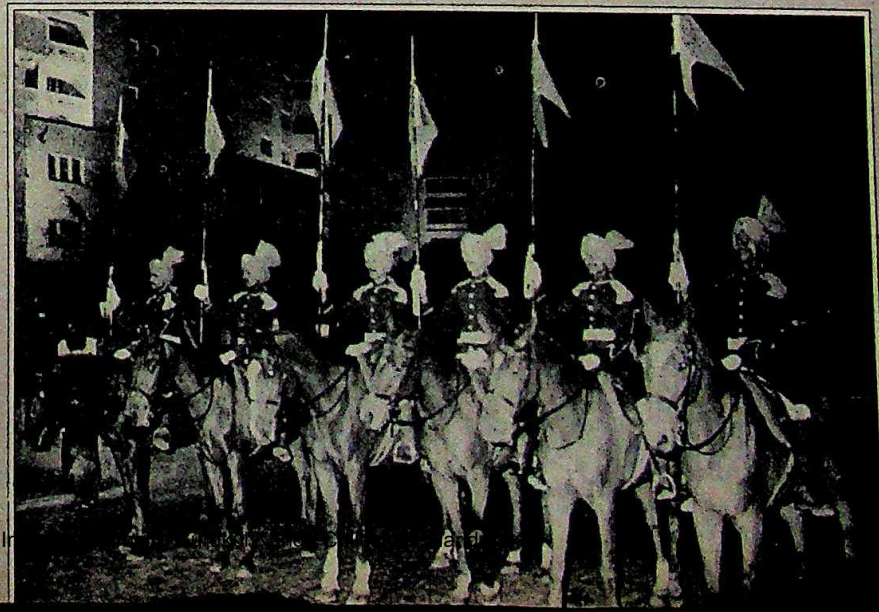
Competition is becoming keener and more evident even in the designing of wedding cards. When M.F. Husain designed cards for an industrialist, the industrialist's brother got B. Prabha to design the cards for his daughter's wedding. Not everybody, however, goes for painters. Invitation cards even come in the form of heavily-embroidered fans or gilded scrolls.

To keep above the rising tide of the middle class, the rich have to find even newer ways to spend money on weddings. Gifts are the easy way out. An ingenious industrialist printed invitations which had perforated slips with

The orgy of excess is not simply the public display of black money; it is also the public expression of private fantasy.

King and Queen for the day (right); mounted regalia on hire





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numbers on them for a lucky draw attached: the winner got a trip for two to the US, the runner-up went to England.

The not-so-fortunate send silver boxes, dry fruit, "suitings", plane tickets to attend the wedding—a Bangalore industrialist took a plane-load of guests to Goa. Women attending a 'ladies sangeet' were given little silver boxes with *sindoor* and *bindis* made of gold. At another wedding in Bombay chosen guests were given thick gold chains. A garment exporter even sent outfits to go with the various wedding themes to the guests. New embellishments are stir-sticks, coasters, matchboxes and napkins with the names of the couples. Sometimes, the names are even engraved on a grain of rice.

Often, parents are like generals planning strategy. An exporter, who now lives in London and whose son recently married the daughter of an NRI based in Kuwait, had files for each of the six functions. The first file was for the invitation cards: small baskets with *sindoor*, dry fruit, and betel nuts accompanied the card. The second file was for the sangeet where the theme was Punjabi and women guests received salwar kameez sets. Yet another was for the Kashmir evening: shikaras and house boats were conjured up while ordinary Delhi trees were transformed into chinars with paper and lights, against a green background. The women wore gifted *phirens* (Kashmiri dress) and the men got Kashmiri caps.

But when exotica begins to wear a jaded look, the rich turn to more outrageous themes. The Indian Dolce Vita comes to life: during a farmhouse wedding binge loudspeakers announced masseurs and masseuses for women and men while a lone blonde kept getting dumped into the swimming pool and a nautch girl did her number. It can even get a bit bubbly. One wedding couple sat in a tub while champagne was poured over them to their giggly delight.

Weddings in India have always been the socially sanctioned occasion for a big splash. And the moneyed set the example. A wedding held in Bombay's football stadium a few years ago is still talked about in hushed terms: a fortress with wooden pillars and decor made by craftsmen brought from Rajasthan enclosed 14,000 people and during each of the five nights, the decor was changed to suit the occasion.

But fantasy alone is not enough—for some. It is made to piggyback on hi-tech. Saying it electronically is catching on. Names of the couples emerge from the ends of electronic keyboards, turn into red hearts which merge and become one big pulsating heart. Hearts in red, orange and green are now available on computerised display systems imported from Taiwan. Says Subodh Gupta of Bansal Electronics: "We can feed all shapes into it."

The message is also said with lights. This is specially popular amongst the business community in Delhi and throughout Uttar Pradesh. The names of the couples are thrown across the sky on electric lights. The generator-fed tube lights which blaze in marriage processions have been replaced by running lights which form gushing fountains, rippling circles, incandescent trees, fanning peacocks, and goddesses showering electronic blessings. There are even giant butterflies in between which flutters a busy electric bee. The special effects are created by multi-channel electronic chasers which feed power into the lamps alternately and in succession. A hot item these days is the disco scene. Some couples want to recreate the discos in Hindi films with their mirror walls and strobe lights. Generators keep all the shamiana lights on; portable ones keep the bands playing and the surreal chariots of neon glowing.

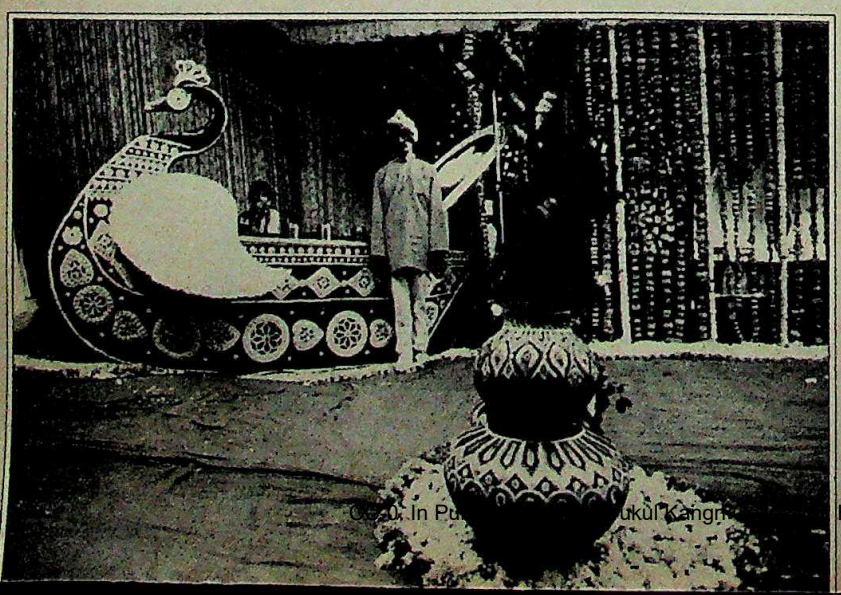
If the sight is enhanced electronically, so is the sound. Japanese mini-synthesisers—keyboards which can imitate violins, guitars, piano, and saxophones—have become an essential part of the major bands in Lucknow and Kanpur. Barats can now disco dance their way to the bride's house, the sound of music further enriched by echo chambers and wa-wa synthesisers.

Technology and tradition are obviously good handmaidens to fabricate weddings. Together, the two are capable of throwing up increasingly outrageous cameos. But when the show is over, both fade out. Only the fantasy persists. The race to put up the Greatest Show on Earth has begun.

—MADHU JAIN

Utsav weddings (left); and peacock paan stall

Parents now design weddings like movie moghuls. In vogue are the Rajput Royal, and Star Wars imagery.



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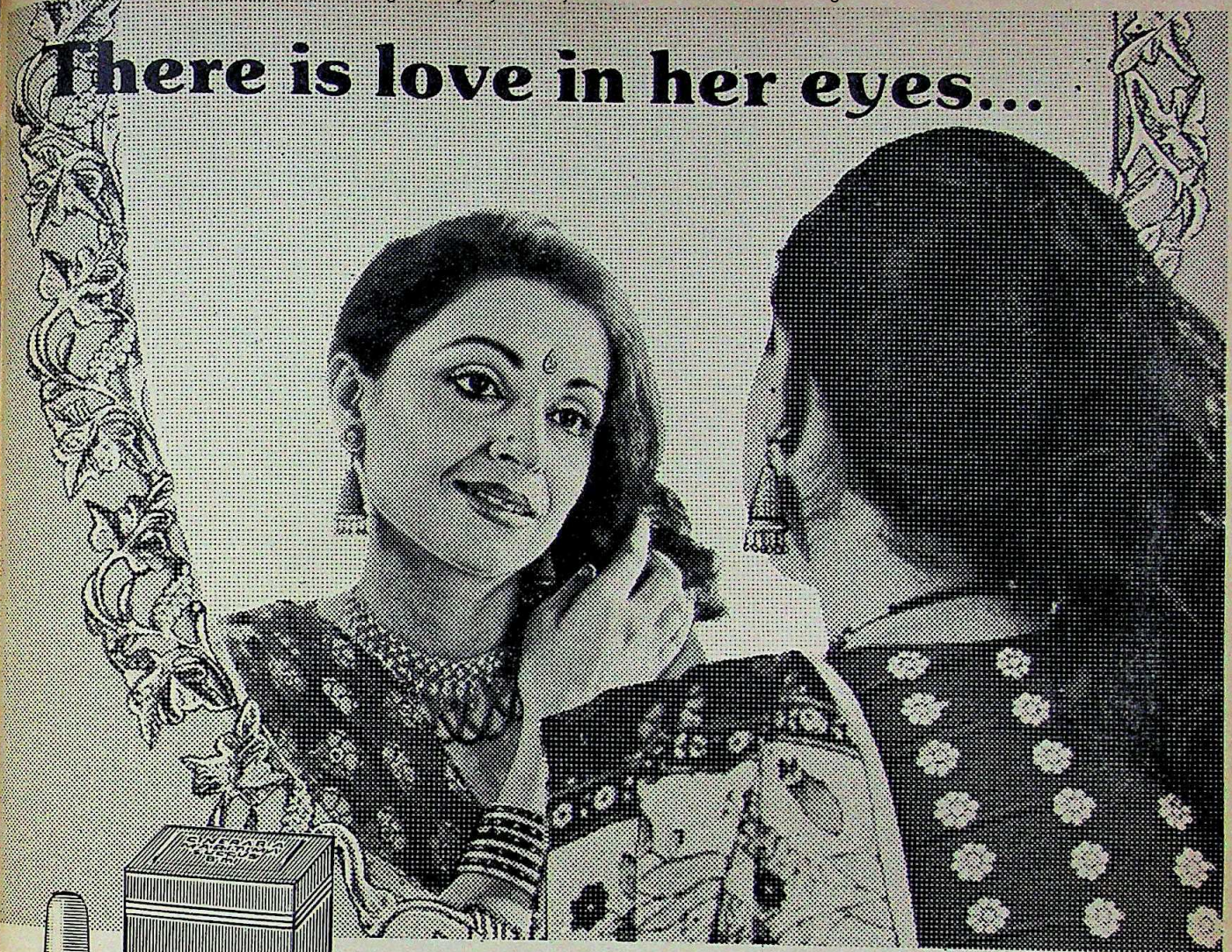

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Speech delivered by Shri K.N. Modi, Chairman & Managing Director at 17th Annual General Meeting of Modi Rubber Ltd. held on Saturday, the 26th November, 1988.

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The working of the company during the current year so far has been encouraging and satisfactory. I hope that in the current year the Company should be able to achieve still better results inspite of considerable rise in the inputs cost and other constraints.

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The Directors are pleased to recommend for your approval a dividend of 25% on equity shares which will absorb Rs. 2.60 crores.

BRIGHT ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

The Indian economy under the dynamic leadership of our Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi has overcome from the ever worst drought of the century with courage. Due to the policies pursued by the Government, hardships and sufferings of the masses could be minimised. All of us should feel proud that the challenge could be met successfully and supplies of essential commodities were maintained at reasonable price throughout the country which is a very big achievement.

Now God has been kind to us. In the current year the monsoon has been excellent in all parts of the country. It is expected that over all growth in 1988-89 will be 8% to 9% and the industrial and agricultural growth will be very impressive. The good monsoon should help us to look forward with optimism. It is heartening that GNP growth of 6% has been projected for the 8th Five Year Plan as compared to 5% in the 7th Five Year Plan. To achieve this objective; minimum investment of Rs. 650,000 crores will be required as against Rs. 322,000 crores in 7th Plan which will mean doubling of our efforts for mobilisation of resources. The private sector will have to play a major role in development because nearly half of the resources are expected to be invested in the private sector. Much greater mobilisation of savings from the primary capital market and improving productivity and viability of the existing industrial units is called for which will be possible through liberal economic policies. The banks and financial institutions which are major source of industrial finance will also be required to play still greater role for which they are fully equipped.

The Government has rightly given very high priority to agriculture which is the backbone of our economy. The massive investment made for agricultural development has increased production. It has changed us from a net importer to a net exporter of agricultural products, we could face the drought with courage and without depending upon foreign countries. I hope that this sector will continue to get due emphasis and in the 8th Five Year Plan, not only will yield and quality be improved, but there will also be much greater encouragement to food processing industry for creating more job opportunities and for boosting exports.

The basic goal of our development efforts has always been to eradicate poverty, in which considerable measure of success has been achieved, though we are still far from our goal of "Garibi Unmoolan". The population below poverty line is expected to be 27% by the end of 7th Plan as against 37% at the beginning of the Plan. It should be aimed that by the end of 8th Plan, nobody remains below the poverty line. This requires that various schemes which have been evolved to eradicate poverty and unemployment, be pursued with greater vigour and leakages be plugged. Much greater attention for population control and for improvement of the skills of the poorer sections by imparting technical education in a bigger way, is also called for.

The emphasis on upgradation of technology, modernisation and liberalised industrial policies, has gradually reduced the gap between India and other exporting countries and gradually we are becoming stronger economically. However, much greater efforts are required both by the industry and the government to make Indian economy cost and quality competitive and to boost exports.

The country can be proud of its progress during the last 41 years of independence which has been possible due to political stability, growth oriented policies and democratic set-up. It is the duty of all of us to maintain this structure. Though we can feel satisfied with our achievements, we still have to go a long way in making our economy competitive, strong and dynamic to enable us to enter 21st century with confidence. Since only 12 years are at our disposal, we have to grow much faster in all areas to keep pace with the industrialised countries. I hope that with the quality of leadership, right policies, good managerial, technical and other skills available in the country, the progress should be much faster than what is being targetted in the 8th Plan. This, however, requires co-operation of all of us and we must maintain democratic traditions and political stability to achieve our goal. We must protect ourselves from religious fundamentalism, regional sentiments, terrorism and other disruptive tendencies so that energy may be concentrated on economic development. Our efforts should be to harness our resources to become strong economically and politically by removing poverty and unemployment and developing science and technology at par with the best in the world.

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EXPORT COMMITMENT

It is the duty of every corporation and industrial house to boost exports and help reduce trade gap. The Modi Group is continuously striving to help the country in promoting exports which is one of the major area of concern because of trade deficit. In 1987-88 the exports of tyres by the Company was Rs.16.69 crores to various countries around the world which included many sophisticated and industrialised markets like USA, UK, USSR, Afghanistan and Middle East. The Company has maintained the top position in exports amongst all tyre companies. This has been possible due to emphasis on quality from the very beginning and marketing skills.

ever growing challenge to economise in use of inputs and produce exacting tyres and tubes.

In order to increase production and improve productivity, the available capacities are being reallocated. Small tyres and tubes of scooters, motorcycles and mopeds are being manufactured at Modinagar instead of Modipuram which will help larger production of giant tyres at Modipuram Plant.

The market share of your Company has tremendously improved in non-truck tyres because of excellent quality, efficient marketing team and after-sales service to the customers. Our motto always has been to satisfy the consumers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- During the year ended 30th April, 1988, gross profit increased to Rs. 35 crores from Rs. 25 crores in the preceding year. The turnover increased from Rs. 356 crores to Rs. 400 crores.
- The economy has very bright outlook due to good monsoon and impressive and dynamic policies of the Government. The country can be proud of its progress due to political stability, growth oriented policies and democratic setup.
- The private sector has to play a major role for the development in the 8th Plan for which large resources will have to be mobilised from the capital market and banks and financial institutions will also be required to play greater role.
- The population below poverty line is expected to decline to 27% by the end of 7th Plan. It should be aimed that nobody remains below poverty line by the end of 8th Plan.
- Agricultural development will have to be pursued with greater emphasis not only to improve yield and quality but also to encourage food processing industry for creating employment and boosting exports.
- There are only 12 years at our disposal to enter 21st century. We have to grow much faster in all areas to reduce gap with industrialised countries.
- We must protect ourselves from religious fundamentalism, regional sentiments, terrorism and other disruptive tendencies.
- The Company is committed to exports and second year in succession emerged as top exporter of tyres.
- Massive investment in road construction is called for creating employment and developing economy.

RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

The in-house Research and Development (R&D) activities are being expanded. R&D Centre is constantly making efforts to produce best quality tyres to meet the requirement of various sectors and to evolve and absorb latest technologies. The Centre also keeps itself fully posted with the latest developments regarding inputs and techniques of production of tyres and tubes which has paid rich dividends. The Centre has been recognised by the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. It has a team of well qualified, dedicated experts which is meeting the

SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Modi Group has always been conscious of its social responsibilities not only for its workers but also for the public of the surrounding areas. Keeping this in view, this year the Company has started computer training for providing science education. The Company has contributed towards adult education and imparted vocational training facilities.

TYRE INDUSTRY

I would like to stress upon some of the problems which are being faced by the Tyre Industry. As I pointed out last year, the industry is facing continuous shortage and increase in the prices of almost all inputs like nylon tyrecord, carbon black, chemicals and rubber which is increasing cost of production and compelling the industry to increase tyre prices. The shortage of essential inputs should be eliminated urgently and to avoid further inflation in the cost of production the import duties should be so fixed that the landed cost of imported inputs is not higher than those produced within the country.

The price of natural rubber which is the basic input is increasing inspite of the fact that production is expected to be higher but still it is much less than demand. The buffer stock scheme has failed to maintain the prices because of rise of rubber prices in international markets. There is a need for reducing import duty so that the final cost is maintained. Much greater investment should be made for the growth of natural rubber which is not keeping pace with increasing demand. It will be in the interest of the country to bring down the cost of inputs rather than import of tyres to ensure cheaper supplies to consumer.

The proper roads are vital for opening rural areas and developing road transport. The construction of roads also helps to create employment in a big way but in the past adequate investment has not been made in this sector. I would urge for massive investment in road construction and to develop major highways by building cement roads. It is also necessary to provide easy finance to the road transporters and remove obstacles of check-posts and octroi which makes road transport costly and time consuming.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to place on record my thanks to the workers, staff and officers at all levels for their dedicated work. The good performance has been possible through team work, cooperation and untiring efforts of employees. The labour management relations had been cordial and harmonious which has helped to achieve the goal of better productivity.

I would like to convey my sincere thanks to Central and State Governments, financial institutions, banks and our collaborators for their continued guidance, support and assistance.

I am also grateful to the customers, dealers and the shareholders for their cooperation and support. I thank the members of the board for their invaluable advice and guidance on various issues from time to time.

Thanking you and wishing you a very happy and prosperous New Year.

NOTE: This does not purport to be record of the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting.

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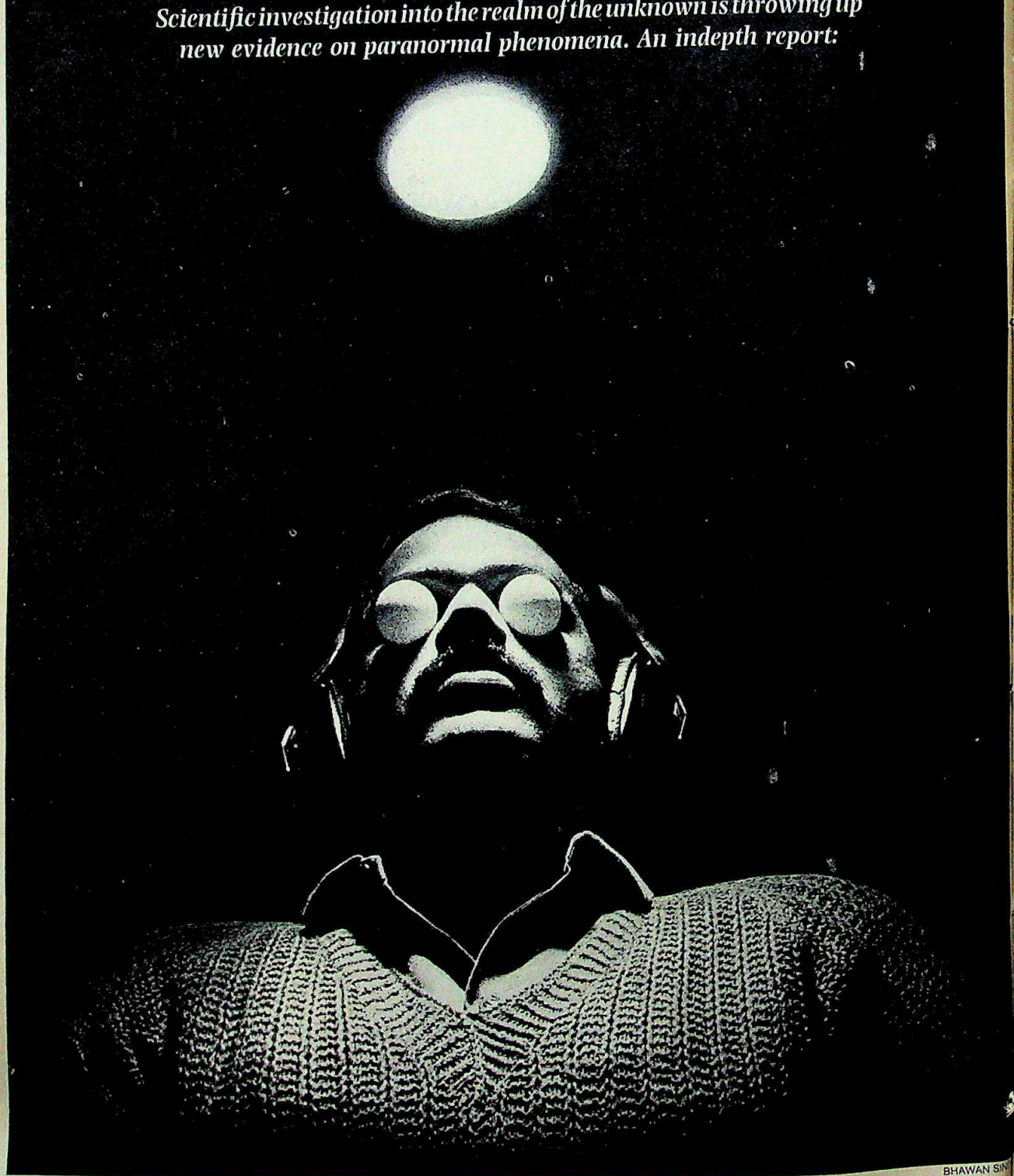
PARAPSYCHOLOGY

Clues to the Unknown

Scientific investigation into the realm of the unknown is throwing up new evidence on paranormal phenomena. An indepth report:



BHAWAN SIN

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"Miracles occur in contradiction not to nature, but what is known to us of nature."
—St Augustine

IN man's quest for a cosmic explanation to the Universe, curious things continue to happen that shake the solid pillars of science. A vivid dream that comes true the next morning. A telephone call from a person just thought of. A sudden remembrance of a past life.

Such experiences, however, were rarely questioned in a country that gave the world the concept of reincarnation. Long before the term 'paranormal phenomena' was coined ancient Indians had already discovered the "ultimate consciousness". Psychical powers or *siddhis* and *vibhutis* were just distractions in the long road to nirvana.

Despite the mindstart the realm of the unknown remained till recently a jealously guarded preserve of a host of mystics and traditional spiritual healers. And faced with a pliable populace, the "frontiers of the mind" soon became the backdoor for charlatans and fakes claiming extraordinary powers.

All that is beginning to change, albeit slowly. In the past two decades a band of investigators called parapsychologists have begun taking what they describe as a "scientific peep into the keyhole of eternity". Their number is small and at times they are derisively referred to as "pariah psychologists". But their findings are already raising the subject from the realm of superstition to that of established scientific research.

A 'scientific peep into the keyhole of eternity' is shattering myths about rebirth and ESP.

The prestigious National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), in Bangalore, for instance, has conducted a systematic investigation of over 250 reported cases of reincarnation. Its findings are shattering several myths of the phenomenon. The study showed most people remembered past lives when they were around three years old. Curiously, 49 per cent of them reportedly suffered violent deaths in their previous lives. Many exhibited traits and phobias that were linked to their previous births. And proving that these experiences were not fantasies, researchers identified in as many as 77 per cent of the cases the deceased persons whom these people claimed to be.

Meanwhile, six universities—Andhra, Delhi, Panjab, Garhwal, Allahabad and at Rewa—are probing what laymen call the sixth sense. Parapsychologists call the phenomenon Extra-Sensory Perception (ESP) or an ability to acquire information shielded from one's senses. They even differentiate between various types of ESP. Telepathy is the awareness of thoughts of another person. Clairvoyance is the ability to know of events that have occurred. Precognition is knowledge of the event before it happened. And psychokinesis is the power to influence objects with just the mind. The unknown factor underlying all these is called psi (after the 23rd letter of the Greek alphabet). And parapsychology is the branch of psychological sciences that studies such psi abilities.

Shed of all that jargon, real-life exam-

Testing for clairvoyance (left); and faith healer in a trance (below)

ASHA SAKLANI

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ples are gripping. For instance, Sreekant Halve (some names listed have been changed to protect privacy) of Pauri in the Garhwal Himalayas got up one night in fright. He had dreamt that his father was lying in a field bleeding badly. The next morning his mother called from Dehra Dun saying his father was beaten up by workers in their farm. They had left him bleeding profusely on a field the previous day just as Halve had dreamt. Though serious, the wounds were not fatal. Halve had just had a clairvoyant experience.

MORE chilling, however, is the case of Sudhir Verma, a cashier in a Delhi restaurant. He was lazing around one day when he had a visual flash. He saw his friend, R. Kapoor, lying on the road bleeding profusely, his car overturned. He warned Kapoor not to undertake a journey he was planning but he did not heed his advice. To Verma's horror he got a call later that day that his friend's car had overturned in an accident and he was injured. His friend survived but Verma is still shaken by the incident.

Such cases are the stuff television serials like *Honee-Anhonee* are made off. (The serial was not extended after rationalist organisations protested that it promoted superstitious belief). But scientific research involves more evidence than "old-wives tales". To discern what triggers ESP Indian researchers have concentrated on laboratory tests. The Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, for instance, found that people who practise yoga and transcendental meditation had higher ESP 'scores' than others. Studies also showed that people exhibit a strange defence mechanism that prevents them from depending on ESP fully. In Chandigarh, studies indicate that students who were extroverted did well in ESP tests. And up in the Garhwal University in Uttar Pradesh, research on traditional faith healers is showing that they do exhibit some pyschokinetic ability.

Much of the findings by Indian researchers tally with similar studies done on rebirth and ESP in other parapsychological institutes dotting the world. But a fund of knowledge is being built on a subject that has intrigued man for centuries. As Professor K. Ramakrishna Rao, the doyen of Indian parapsychological research and currently director of the prestigious Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man in Durham, USA, says: "We are gathering enough evidence to assert confidently that such phenomena exist. Research on the subject is of profound significance. It is not only helping us understand the nature of man but could alter our concept of the Universe."

But parapsychologists are still to alter the concept of other scientists towards their research. Faced with the difficulty of providing "battle-tested" evidence demanded by science, parapsychological research has almost always been met by scorn and scepticism. Despite scientific investigation on ESP being conducted since 1927, the august American Association for the Advancement of Science, reluctantly admitted parapsychologists as members only in 1969.

Stung by the criticism, parapsychologists have concentrated on evolving laboratory techniques and analytical methods that would stand up to the rigid standards laid down for any science. In Andhra University's parapsychology department a typical test to study clairvoyance is under way. The idea is to find out whether a person isolated from external visual and auditory distractions can perceive a hidden object.

In a dimly-lit, soundproof room, is a subject with his eyes covered by halved table-tennis balls that give him a ghoulish look. His ears are covered by headphones and he seems to be in some kind of a trance. The experiment that researcher S. Vijayalakshmi is conducting is called the Ganzfield (German for 'entire field') test.

Earlier an independent witness had randomly picked a picture and placed it in a sealed envelope in the next room. Meanwhile, a recorder is telling the subject to perform a series of

REBIRTH

A Startling Case

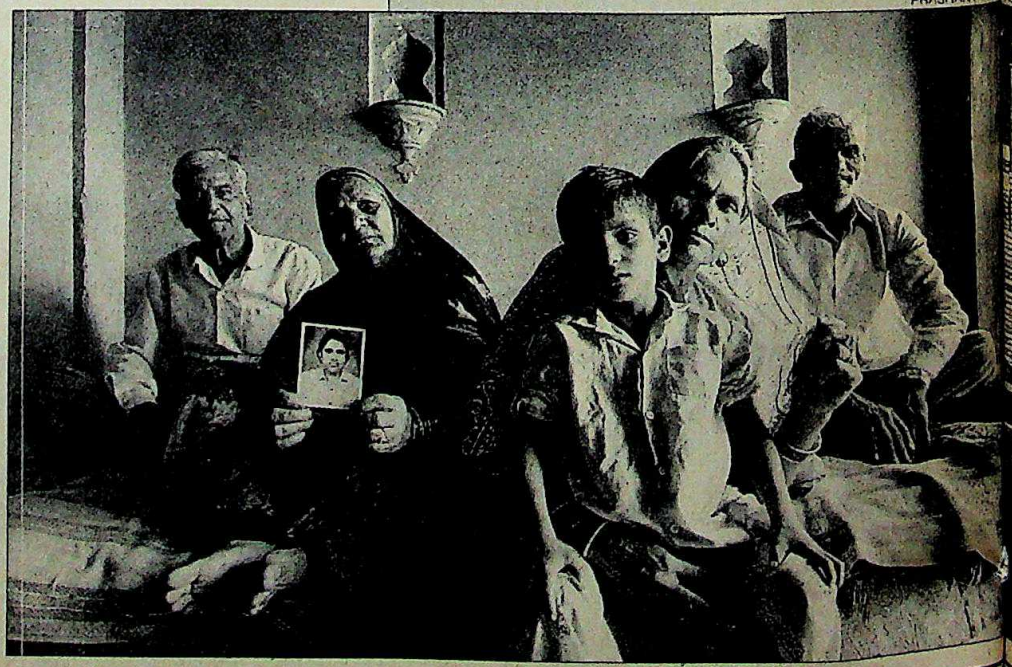
Suresh Verma, Died: August 28, 1983;
Reborn: December 10, 1983?

HE is just five years old. But when Toran Singh or sing Titu talks of his claimed past life, his tone becom manly: "I'm Suresh Verma. I have a radio shop in Ag My wife's name is Uma and we have two sons."

He even remembers how he died: "I was returning home car one night after work. I blew the horn for Uma to open house gate. Two people with guns came running towards and opened fire. A bullet struck me on the head."

Titu's father, Mahavir Prasad, and mother, Shanthi, b embarrassed, but he continues pointing to them: "These not my parents. I'm just passing through here. My real pare

PRASHANT PANJIA



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laxation exercises. Random sounds then filter through the adphone. In this "altered state of consciousness" he is asked to eak out thoughts that flash through his mind.

Jerkily, he begins to speak: "I hear the sound of water rushing wn or pouring down. Like a waterfall. I am standing near the aterfall. It's a beautiful scene. Perhaps it's near a mountain, the aterfall. I feel very cold and feel like getting under a warm anket." After he stops speaking, Vijayalakshmi opens the velope. Amazingly, the picture has a waterfall against the ckdrop of looming mountains just as he had described.

Two years ago, Dr U. Vindhya Sudhakar, a lecturer in the partment, carried out similar tests on 50 students. They were vided into two groups and each student went through five such ssions'. Under accepted mathematical calculations, 20 per nt, or 25 correct answers out of 125 sessions, could be arrived by sheer chance. But the two groups showed what researchers nsider statistically significant scores of around 40 correct ch. The conclusion: altered state of consciousness like the Ganzfield situation facilitates the manifestation of ESP qualities.

Some of the Indian research has been pathbreaking. Ramakrishna Rao, for instance, is credited with evolving what is now called the "differential effect of psi". While he was conducting the standard ESP card tests (in which people are asked to perceive the order of symbols appearing in a pack of cards) a curious phenomenon kept occurring. People who did extremely well in discerning one set of symbols did badly when shown another set. Says Rao: "An inbuilt defence mechanism in the brain seems to ensure that people use their psi abilities selectively."

Much of the research on ESP is, as parapsychologist Dr Shanti Krishnan says, "trying to pin down the elusive quality of psi" Tests such as the Ganzfield and those on yoga and meditation, show that by eliminating the normal clutter of messages in the brain ESP abilities seem to be heightened. But as P.V. Krishna Rao, professor of parapsychology at Andhra University, says: "The search is for replicability. If more and more studies show consistent results then it points to several factors that could

e in Agra." Shanthi, with tears welling in her eyes, says: "It's een like this since he was three. He first used to throw plates, alk a lot, tell me I was wearing torn sarees and kept talking bout being some Suresh Verma."

When Titu became inconsolable, his brother, Ashok, went Agra, 13 km from their village, Badh, to check. He was hocked to find that there was a Suresh adio Shop on Agra's busy Mall Road. A lesman even confirmed that a Suresh erma did own it and was shot dead five ars ago exactly the way Titu had scribed and that his widow's name as Uma and she had two sons.

Uma was intrigued by the story of e young boy who claimed to be her usband. The next day, she along with uresh's parents, Chanda Bahu Bhartiya and Burfi Devi and his three brothers drove to Titu's house in Badh.

When Titu saw them, he immediately recognised Suresh's parents and hugged them. He cast a shy glance towards Uma and then ran to where their car was parked. Seeing it was a Maruti he cried: "Why didn't you bring my Fiat car?" Bhartiya was puzzled: "How did he know what car Suresh had? We had sold it."

> Uma, Suresh's, widow, says: "It serves no purpose. We can't have the same relationship again."

They then took him in their car to Agra. Without informing Titu they drove past Suresh's radio shop. He immediately recognised the shop and asked them to stop. He strode in, slapped a stool (a habit Uma says Suresh had) and then pointed to a show-case and asked: "When was that built? It wasn't there before." The show-case had in fact been put up after Suresh's death.

More startling evidence came when parapsychological researchers, Dr N.K. Chadha of Delhi University and Dr Entonia Mills of the University of Virginia, USA, began making a detailed investigation of Titu's case. Among the things they corroborated was a curious dent on Titu's right temple. They checked the autopsy report of Suresh Verma and found that the bullet's entry point corresponded with Titu's birthmark.

Even more eerie was that the autopsy report showed that the bullet had ricocheted from the skull and passed out below the right ear. When they looked below Titu's ear, sure enough, there was a starburst like birthmark.

While Suresh's parents are convinced that he is their son reborn, Uma, his widow, is more pragmatic: "I know it is Suresh. But I realise no purpose can be served. We can't have the same relationship again."

However, Mahesh, Suresh's younger brother, says: "Everybody knew my brother in Agra and how he died. How do we know this boy hasn't been taught to say all this? I'm not convinced that this is Suresh reborn." The researchers are unwilling to commit themselves and Dr Chadha says: "It would take years of investigation to rule out all other explanations. But there is no doubt Titu is undergoing an intensely paranormal experience."

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Agra

tu with parents and Suresh's parents olding his photo; (below) with Uma

PRASHANT PANJIAR

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trigger ESP qualities."

Unfortunately, for parapsychologists, replicability has proved as elusive too. For instance, when Shanti Krishna conducted tests to duplicate Ramakrishna Rao's "differential effect" her results were not definitive. It's a problem that bugs other institutes in the world. They found that subjects who scored high initially seemed to perform poorly in later tests. While researchers explained it away as "subject boredom" it gave cause to sceptics to question ESP tests.

To worsen matters, barring several theories, no real breakthrough has come as to how the psi mechanism works. The key problem lay in explaining how information could be transmitted so rapidly and over such great distances. Speculation that it was some kind of electromagnetic waves being transmitted by the brain was disproved by Russian scientists. When subjects were put in a room lined with a thick metal that could block electromagnetic waves, they still demonstrated ESP abilities.

Studies indicate that people who practised yoga and meditation did well in tests for ESP abilities.

SOME researchers theorise that psi operates in a "space-warp" or bridge across space that transcends the three-dimensional framework. Others talk of it being caused by a cortical excitation in the brain which emits a cloud of particles of imaginary mass called 'psitrons' that trigger response in the receptive brain cells of another person. More philosophical is the theory, that psi operates in what is called "the collective unconscious" field through which all beings are linked. However, Ramakrishna Rao, regretfully points out: "None of these have been tested in the laboratory. We are as far away in explaining the psi mechanism as when we began."

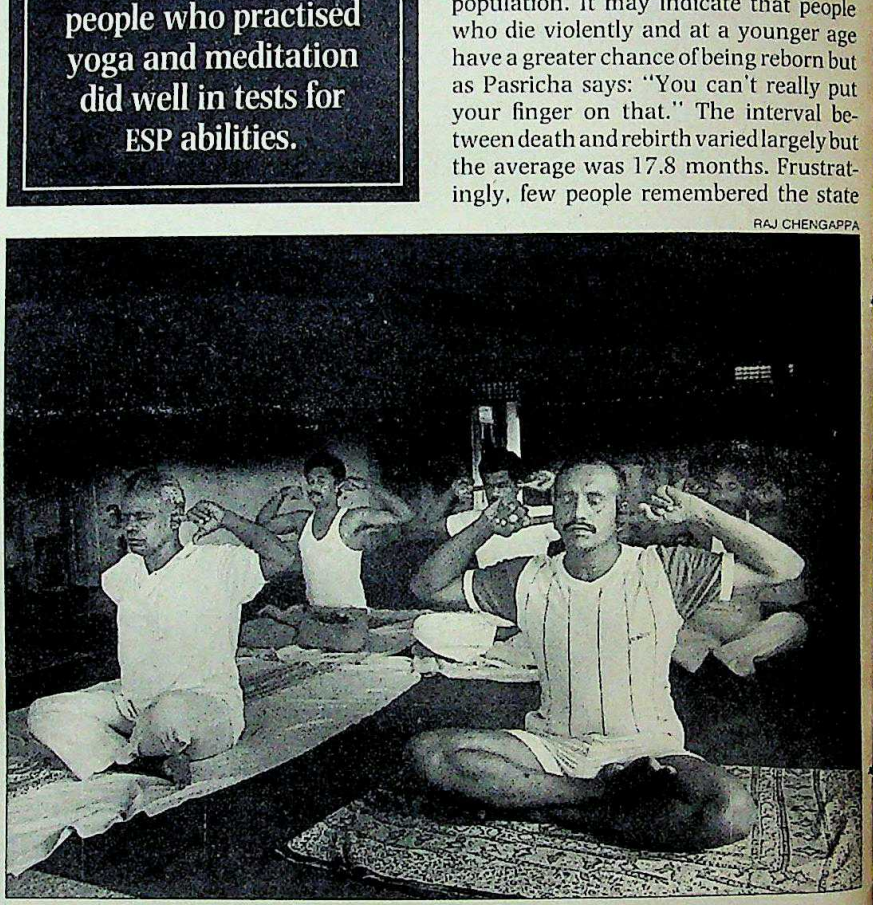
While ESP researchers have stuck to the laboratory, those studying reincarnation have moved to the field. Perhaps the most systematic research done on rebirth is by Dr Satwant Pasricha, an assistant professor in the NIMHANS clinical psychology department. Since 1975, Dr Pasricha has researched over 250 such cases, many of them in collaboration with the well known reincarnation researcher Ian Stevenson of Virginia University in the US.

Her task was difficult. Since most of the cases were reported from remote villages, Pasricha had to "wade through rivers, ride on bullock-carts and walk miles and miles" to locate cases and corroborate evidence. And if the study had to be scientific it meant cross-checking each detail. Each case, for instance, involves interviews with at least 20 people, both from the subjects' current and claimed past lives. To discern patterns, Pasricha worked out something like 60 variables including finding out when exactly people start speaking of their previous lives, their interaction with people in their claimed past lives and the interval between death and rebirth.

Her research indicated that in many cases a casual remark or event triggers their memory. For instance, Ajit Singh in Chandigarh remembered his previous life when his aunt remarked: "It's so hot today that even if I die you don't have to cremate me. I'll just burn up." To which Ajit replied: "Nothing happened to me when they burnt me after I died." Ajit then began talking of his previous life as a magistrate in Rawalpindi. Like Ajit as many as 82 per cent of the people studied were able to remember their names in their previous lives and other details.

There was another curious phenomenon: in as many as 49 per cent of the cases the people died violently in their previous lives. That was significantly higher than the 7 per cent of violent deaths occurring in normal population. The median age at which death occurred in her studies was 34—also lower than that of the general population. It may indicate that people who die violently and at a younger age have a greater chance of being reborn but as Pasricha says: "You can't really put your finger on that." The interval between death and rebirth varied largely but the average was 17.8 months. Frustratingly, few people remembered the state they existed in during the interim period.

RAJ CHENGAPPA



Subjects being tested to study the link between ESP and yoga

Strikingly in around 26 per cent of the cases, people exhibited phobias of the very things that caused their death. A young girl from Mathura was always afraid of going near wells. She claimed that in her past life, she died while fetching water from a well. Others exhibited traits characteristic of their previous life. A boy, who was a carpenter in his previous life, showed remarkable dexterity in handling tools and knew exactly how to make a chair. A Muslim boy, who was a Jain in his previous life, insisted on being a vegetarian and having only two meals: before sunrise and after sunset. And in cases of sex change (Pasricha hasn't found too many) a girl, who claimed to be a man in her previous life, spoke in a guttural voice when she talked of the past.

A universal finding was that memories of their previous lives stopped haunting these children when they were around seven

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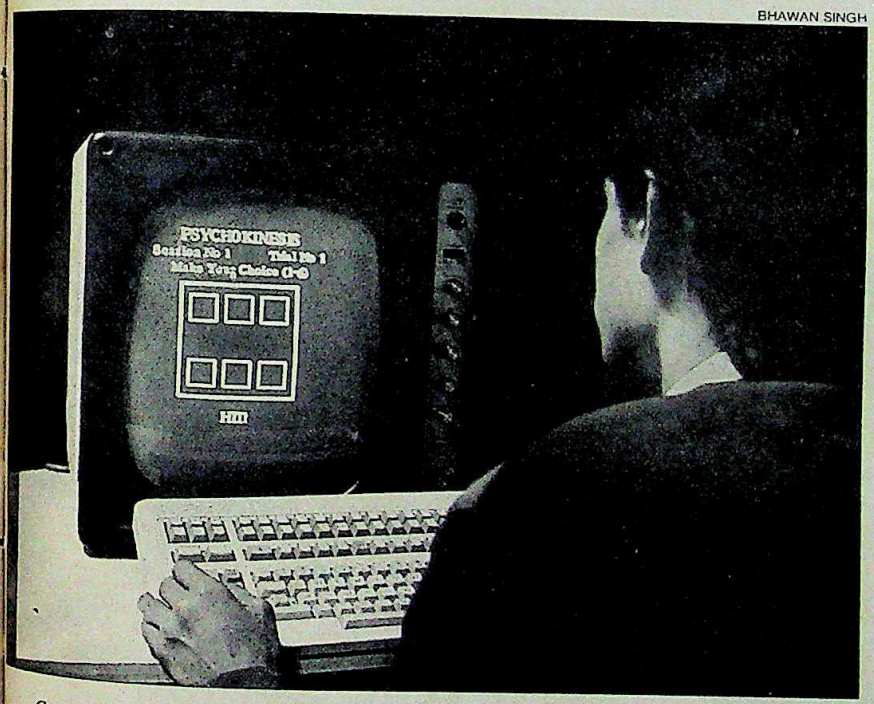
years of age. And when they grew up they had doubts about whether they actually spoke of such a life. As Pasricha says: "It's reassuring for parents to know that their children forget their previous lives and can live normally."

The real difficulty for reincarnation researchers like Pasricha lay in establishing that these were cases of rebirth and not other psychic phenomena. One of the possible explanations is information being transmitted through genetic connections. But she found that in around 80 per cent of the cases people were not related by blood to his supposedly past incarnation.

Other parapsychological researchers argue that these people are not reborn but are really exhibiting a super ESP ability. This gives them the power to pick up information of another person transcending normal physical and mental barriers. Pasricha's argument is simple: "How come these people don't exhibit similar abilities for other events in their life and only selectively remember one person's

A traditional faith healer demonstrated psychokinetic ability to induce wheat seeds to grow faster.

BHAWAN SINGH



Computer simulations to test psychokinetic abilities

life?" Despite building such a massive amount of data, Pasricha says cautiously: "My research so far shows that reincarnation is the most plausible hypothesis."

If there is any criticism of Pasricha's work, it is that her cases have come largely from north India. Inexplicably she hasn't met with the same amount of success in locating cases in the south. Also, the average distance between the so-called previous birth and present one was around 30 km, which does not rule out completely some other form of psychical interaction. Other critics point out that many of the cases seem to remember living in richer families than their present lives—implying thereby a hope for monetary gain. To which, Pasricha cryptically observes: "My studies show that hoaxing of rebirth type is the least profitable way of acting dishonestly."

As difficult is proving psychokinetic abilities or the ability to influence matter with the mind. Up in the Himalayas, in Srinagar (Uttar Pradesh), Dr Alok Saklani of the Garhwal University, is cooped in a small room with a shrieking, apparently possessed, woman. Outside the room a huge queue of people waits. The Bakhia or shamin, as the woman is known in Garhwal, claims to be possessed by a local deity that gives her super ESP abilities. People come to her for help for such diverse problems as illnesses, financial difficulties and marital and career problems.

When Saklani began his study two years ago, he concentrated on studying the Bakhia's psychokinetic abilities. He got the Bakhia to bless some wheat seeds and little water meant to be poured after sowing. He then planted these along with other seeds (the control group). The seeds blessed by the Bakhia and nurtured by the water showed a significantly faster growth rate.

Saklani did another series of tests and found that it was the blessed water that was really causing the change. To his surprise, a spectroscopic analysis of the water showed that it had undergone a colour change. When he introduced a poison, like saline solution which retards growth of seeds, he found that by blessing it the Bakhia could negate its impact. While it did indicate that the Bakhia, had some faith healing abilities, Saklani now hopes to replicate his experiments to see if it happens consistently. As he wryly points out: "Scepticism levels are extremely high in this business."

Meanwhile, back in Andhra University researchers are devising computer games to test psychokinetic abilities. The computer simulates the throwing of dice based on a programme where the probability of a particular number cropping up is one in a million. A subject is then tested to find out whether he can influence the computer to flash the numbers his mind demands. Detailed studies have begun.

If there is a common thread through these diverse experiments it is the lack of conclusive evidence. Despite the growing body of knowledge, the psi phenomena continues to confound its own researchers. The breakthroughs have been in discerning patterns, detecting some signals and destroying some myths. But the core force that is causing these seemingly paranormal phenomena is yet to be defined. It is a problem that hounds similar studies done mainly in the UK, US and Soviet Union. While laboratory techniques have become more sophisticated with computers replacing cards and precision detectors replacing simple instruments, doubts still persist over the methodology that is being adopted.

What parapsychology has found so far is sufficient evidence to encourage further research. As Ramakrishna Rao says: "If one looks objectively at the data collected it would be foolish to say there is nothing to it. Maybe there is an ordinary explanation to all these phenomena. But we have to keep our minds open and we may come up with answers." However, he confesses that he has no precognitive abilities to predict how long it would take.

—RAJ CHENGAPPA in Bangalore, Visakhapatnam and Garhwal

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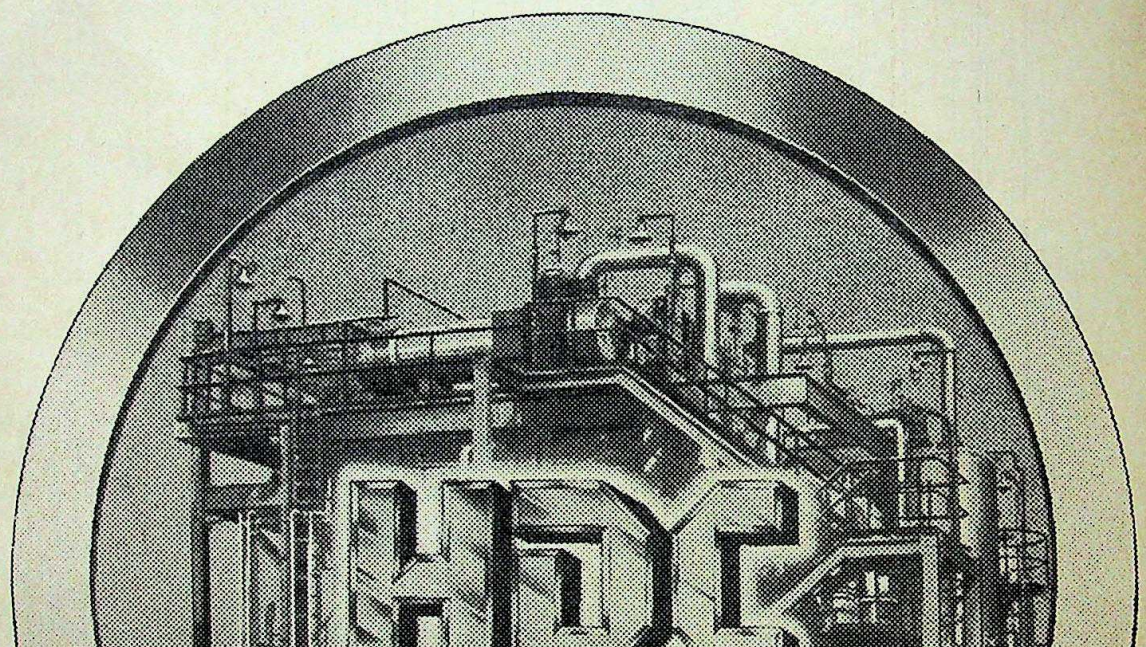

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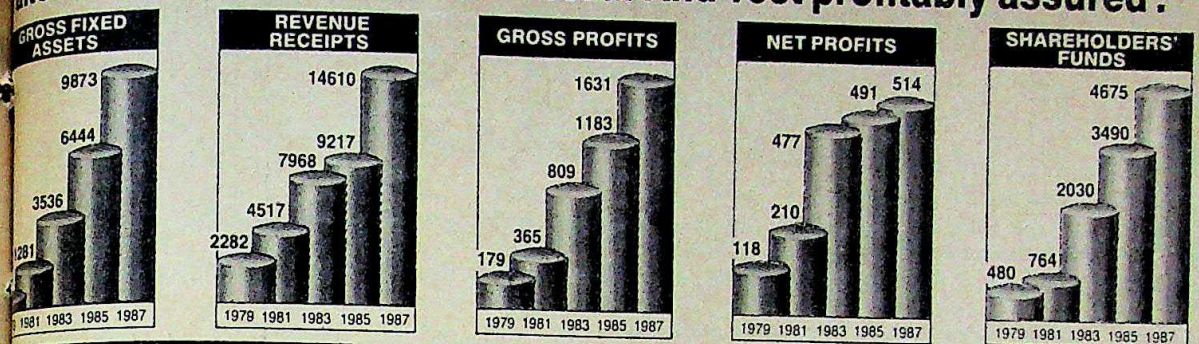

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IOA ELECTIONS

Unsporting Contest

Adityan pips Kalmadi at the post

FOR the meddlesome, inept managers of Indian sport the most important Olympic event is the presidential sweepstakes. This, like the Olympics itself, comes once in four years, and this year—in the plush environs of the five-star Park Sheraton hotel in Madras—it was clear that the contest is getting keener than ever before.

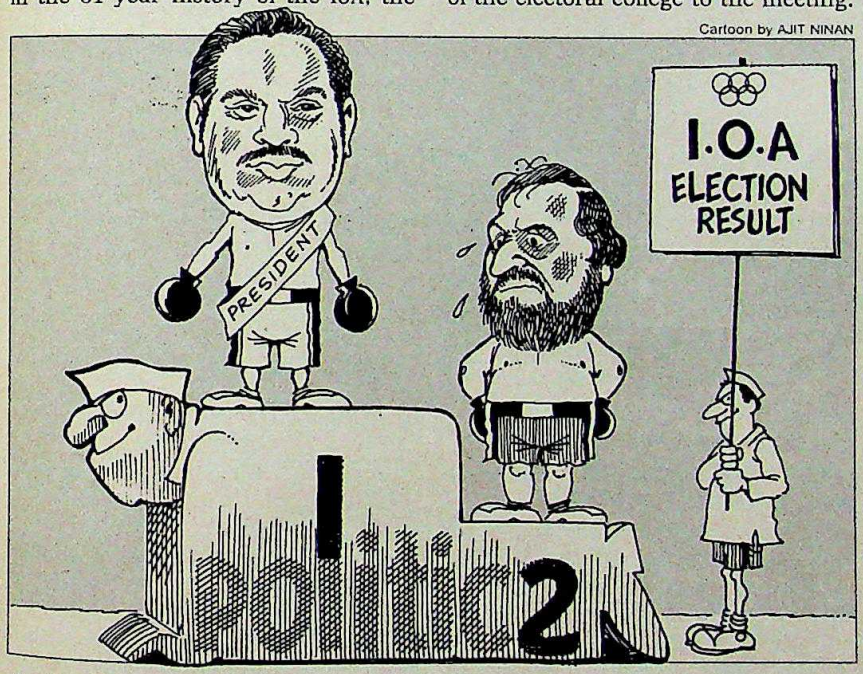
Earlier, the election of the president of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) was a one horse race, as backdoor machinations usually ended in an unanimous choice. But now, for the first time in the 61-year history of the IOA, the election seemed more like the fight for the world heavyweight boxing title.

In the ring were the reigning IOA chief Sivanthi Adityan, 52, brought in as an interim arrangement after the dramatic ouster of Vidya Charan Shukla in October 1987, and his rival, Congress(I) MP Suresh Kalmadi, 44. If the pre-contest build up was any indication, Kalmadi should have received a knock-out blow. Adityan supporters claimed Kalmadi would not get more than a dozen of the 125 votes in the electoral college—comprising representatives of 29 national sports federations, 21 Olympic associations and the two Indians on the International Olympic Committee.

But at the November 27 election, Adityan himself barely managed a split decision victory. Though a well-known figure in sports administration for nearly two decades, he got only 67 votes while the remaining 52 of the 119 votes cast went Kalmadi's way.

Even for this slim margin Adityan had to pull out all the stops. Soon after the Seoul Olympics, he, or his emissaries, approached voters scattered across the country. Air tickets to Madras, accommodation at the Park Sheraton and an array of gifts were used to lure members of the electoral college to the meeting.

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



This too would not have ensured his victory if Union Home Minister Buta Singh and Minister of State for Food Processing Jagdish Tytler had not backed him.

Though a relative newcomer to sports organisations, Kalmadi had begun his campaign early. The organiser of the Pune marathon and the Great Freedom Run at Delhi, Kalmadi, who took over as president of the Amateur Athletic Federation of India last year, converted the race for the IOA presidentship into a long distance marathon. He contacted voters, used party pressure, tried to get a Congress(I) whip to muster support, and even got Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar to telephone key members of the electoral college.

Yet, once he lost the race, Kalmadi was bitter. He accused Adityan of engineering an unfair victory. He even argued that as Adityan was contesting for a second term, he required a two-third majority and therefore he (Kalmadi) was the winner. Minister of State for Sports Margaret Alva too was a victim of Kalmadi's ire. "She interfered with the election at every step by grossly misusing her position," he charged.

The charge-trading and outright attempts to buy votes upset many. "The manner in which they tried to influence voters is unfair and a travesty of the Olympic spirit. Our business is to promote sport with a sense of fairplay," said V.G. Govindan Nair, member of the IOA's outgoing executive committee. Added T. Rajagopalachari, the IOA associate vice-president: "The infusion of politics beginning with Shukla's regime, and Kalmadi's attempt to make it some kind of Congress(I) stronghold is shameful."

If the IOA has been politicised it is because the stakes are high. With the phenomenal growth in sports infrastructure after the 1982 Delhi Asiad; revival of the national games under the IOA banner in Delhi in 1985; and, more recently, the introduction of sponsorship at the biennial games in Trivandrum last year, the IOA's power has been steadily growing, making it the apex sports body in the country—control over which is worth jostling for.

Though Adityan and Kalmadi fought a no-holds-barred battle for the presidentship, both support more autonomy for sport federations and minimum government intervention. Said Adityan after his election: "My wish is to shift gear and put India in the great take-off phase starting with the Beijing Asian Games....There are some points which aren't conducive to the promotion and development of sport. We'll sort out these issues with the Government."

His first task will be to begin a fresh dialogue with the Government on evolving a firm policy to select, train and equip Indian teams for international events. Earlier, Adityan, who is also the chairman of the finance committee of the Olympic Council of Asia, had considerable success in raising the standards of Indian volleyball, and he can use the same methods to revive other sports. A marksman and a rifle shooting medalist, Adityan will at least see the target clearly, even if he does not hit the bull's eye every time. —AMARNATH K. MENON in Madras

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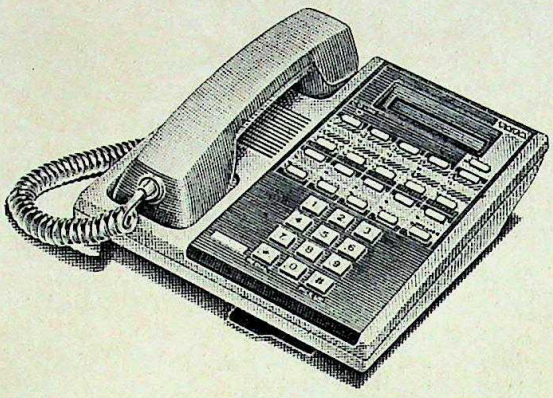

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CHESS

A Stalemate

India do well at Olympiad but...

PLAYERS are the pawns in Indian chess. But despite missing the first round, thanks to bungling by the game's official promoters, the All India Chess Federation (AICF), the Indian team made some fine moves to come out with flying colours in the 28th Chess Olympiad at Thessalonika in Greece.

At the end of the 18-day championship the men's team finished 19th among 107 and the women's team 13th among 58. Both fared better than at the Dubai Olympiad in 1986 where the men were ranked 25th and the women 19th.

But they might have done even better if the chess federation and the Sports Ministry had cleared the players in time. If they had not missed the first round against lowly Venezuela the men's team would have finished in the top 10—automatically qualifying for the world team championship for the first time. The final tally showed that if the men had managed just 1.5 points more they would have finished somewhere between the seventh and tenth place. By missing the first round India lost four valuable points.

Playing on the top board, 19-year-old Viswanathan Anand, the country's only grandmaster, did not lose even a single game. He justified his high international rating by scoring five wins and securing seven draws against stiff opposition, mostly other grandmasters.

With a final tally of seven points from the ten rounds he played, Dibyendu Barua, the 24-year-old Jamshedpur-based TISCO employee, did exceedingly well. But as so often in the past, he buckled when under pressure. He thus again narrowly missed his first grandmaster norm (three are needed for the title), this time by half a point.

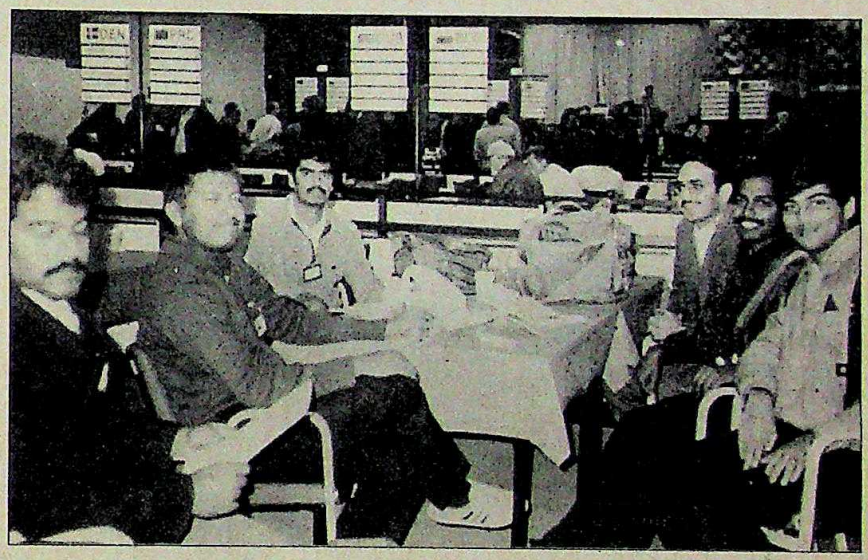
K. Murugan, 24, of the Neyveli Lignite Corporation in Tamil Nadu, taking part in his first Olympiad, scored 4.5 points from the nine rounds he played and recorded a sensational win over the British grandmaster Jonathan Mestel. India shocked Britain, seeded No. 2 behind the USSR, with a 2.5-1.5 win in the crucial seventh round even though Britain had grandmasters on all four boards.

The other players also did well. While D.V. Prasad, the 26-year-old Bangalore-based Union Bank of India officer, picked up seven points from 11 rounds his bank colleague from Bombay, Pravin Thipsay, 29, scored two points in five games. And Captain Ravisekhar, 34, the Bangalore-based officer of Lakshmi Mills, got three points from the five games he played.

The women's team with just four players and no substitute did well to finish 19th. Bhagyashree Sathe-Thipsay, 27, an officer of the Industrial Development Bank of India and captain of the side, with 6.5 points from nine rounds was the best player. Another striking performance was Anupama Abhyankar's. Although she had to play four grandmasters, she narrowly missed the women's grandmaster norm. Vasanthi Unni, 27, the eldest of the Khadilkar sisters, played 12 rounds but got only 6.5 points and the baby of the team P.V. Nirmala from Coimbatore managed to get 2.5 points from seven rounds.

The irony is that India may not have made it to the Olympiad at all. The blame for nearly missing it must be placed squarely on India's first international master in chess and AICF Secretary Manuel Aaron. Though he named himself the chief of the delegation Aaron did not make any effort to get official sanction and clearance for the team to travel to Greece. The invitation to the Olympiad reached the federation in June 1988 but the proposal was sent to the ministry only in October. Aaron suggested that he himself lead the team. But since an inquiry against him and the AICF Treasurer T.K. Ohri was on, ministry officials delayed the clearance until the players themselves pleaded that they should not be penalised for the faults of others. Finally, after a lot of lobbying, including a visit to Margaret Alva, the sports minister, the team was cleared.

This was not the only instance in which Aaron had bungled. Earlier, by delaying the payment of fees to the international chess federation, he deprived national junior champion P.D.S. Girinath of his only chance to take part in the world junior championship in Adelaide in September. Alva has ordered an inquiry into the litany of charges against Aaron and others in the AICF.



Men's team in Greece: new heights

Aaron refuses to discuss the charges. Says he: "The federation has sent its replies to the ministry and I do not wish to comment on what some disgruntled elements might say."

Players like Ravisekhar, Thipsay and Bhagyashree are livid about the way Aaron and others in the federation have dealt with them. "If a player did not support the way Aaron and Ohri ran the AICF he was in trouble," says Thipsay.

What makes the divisions in the federation especially saddening is that they should have arisen not after India had received a drubbing in an international competition but at a time when Indian chess players have done so remarkably well. Right now the position in the national chess federation can be described as a stalemate. If a way out is not found soon, the only sufferers will be the players themselves. A sad comment on an organisation which had once prided itself on being the only sports federation in the country to be run by former sportsmen.

—AMARNATH K. MENON in Madras

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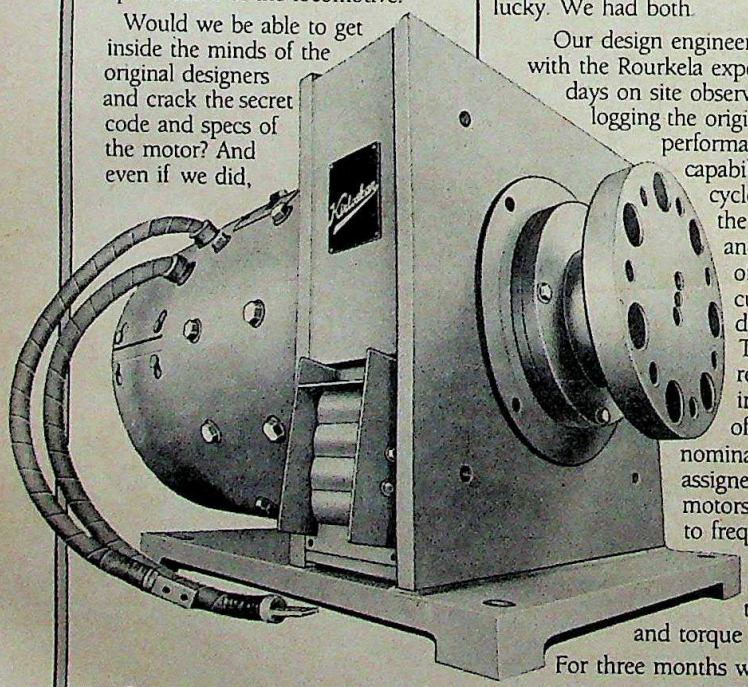
Would we be able to get inside the minds of the original designers and crack the secret code and specs of the motor? And even if we did, could we attain the technological level of the Americans? And could we improvise and invent since we couldn't possibly have access to the materials they used?



Hardly anyone in the industry was willing to take on the job. Were we then rushing in where angels fear to tread? Quite likely. But, we decided, nothing ventured, nothing gained. We said yes.

The whole essence of import substitution is a strong and experienced engineering team with the patience and the commitment to work for years till it designs and manufactures an identical replacement for the original. Plus one other critical factor: the total involvement and continuous guidance of the customer. We were lucky. We had both.

Our design engineers along with the Rourkela experts, spent days on site observing and logging the original motor's performance, capabilities, duty cycle loadings, the frequency and duration of the currents drawn, etc. They realized that irrespective of the nominal ratings assigned to these motors, they had to frequently deliver thrice the power and torque expected. For three months we studied the motor in our factory. We took it apart, grasped its design philosophy, then finalized kilowatt, torque, speed and overload parameters. We got down to the drawing board. The designing objective was to pack as much power as possible into a small frame and to maintain sufficient reserves to meet the demands of traction duty.

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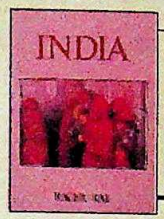
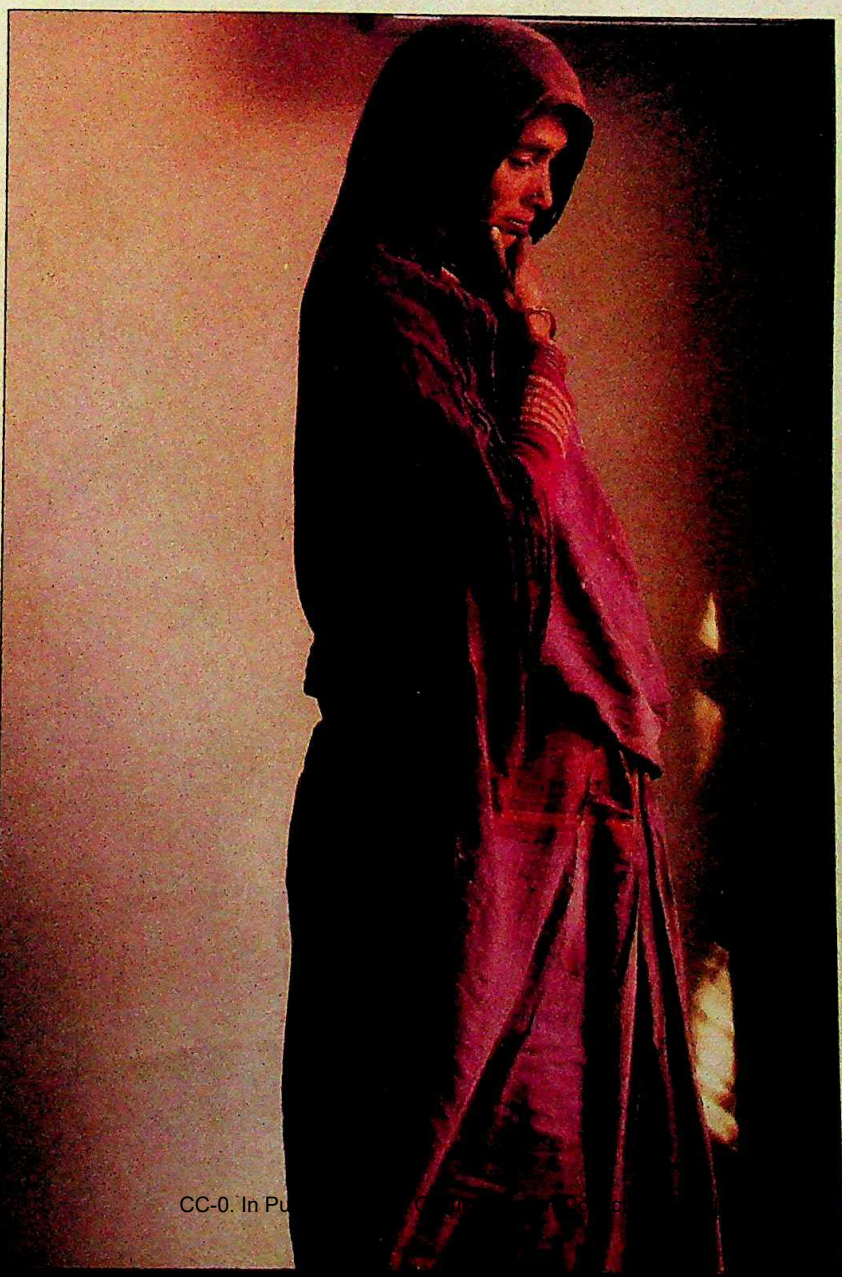
An Artist's India



INDIA
by RAGHU RAI
Time Books International
Price: Rs 650; Pages: 191

HE prowls through the early morning mist like a hunter stalking his prey, a tall, lean, saturnine figure framed against the backdrop of some historic monument. His mind seems elsewhere, tuned to some distant orchestra only he can hear. But the eyes are a prologue to his restlessness, darting here and there as he calculates angles and speed and distance and light. This is the supreme moment, an artist in search of that rare millisecond of communion with his subject.

A village woman pauses for reflection



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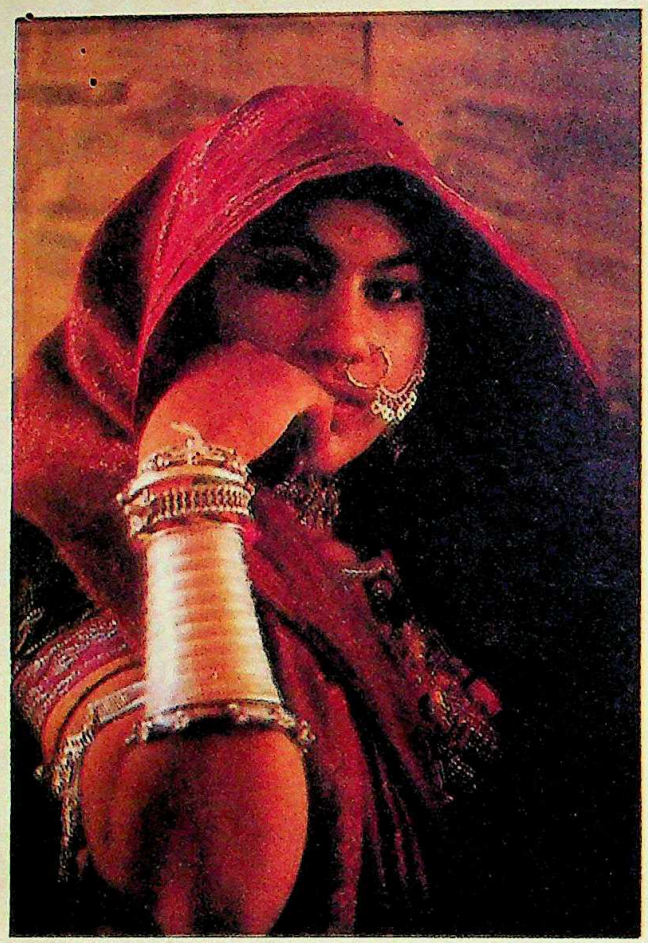

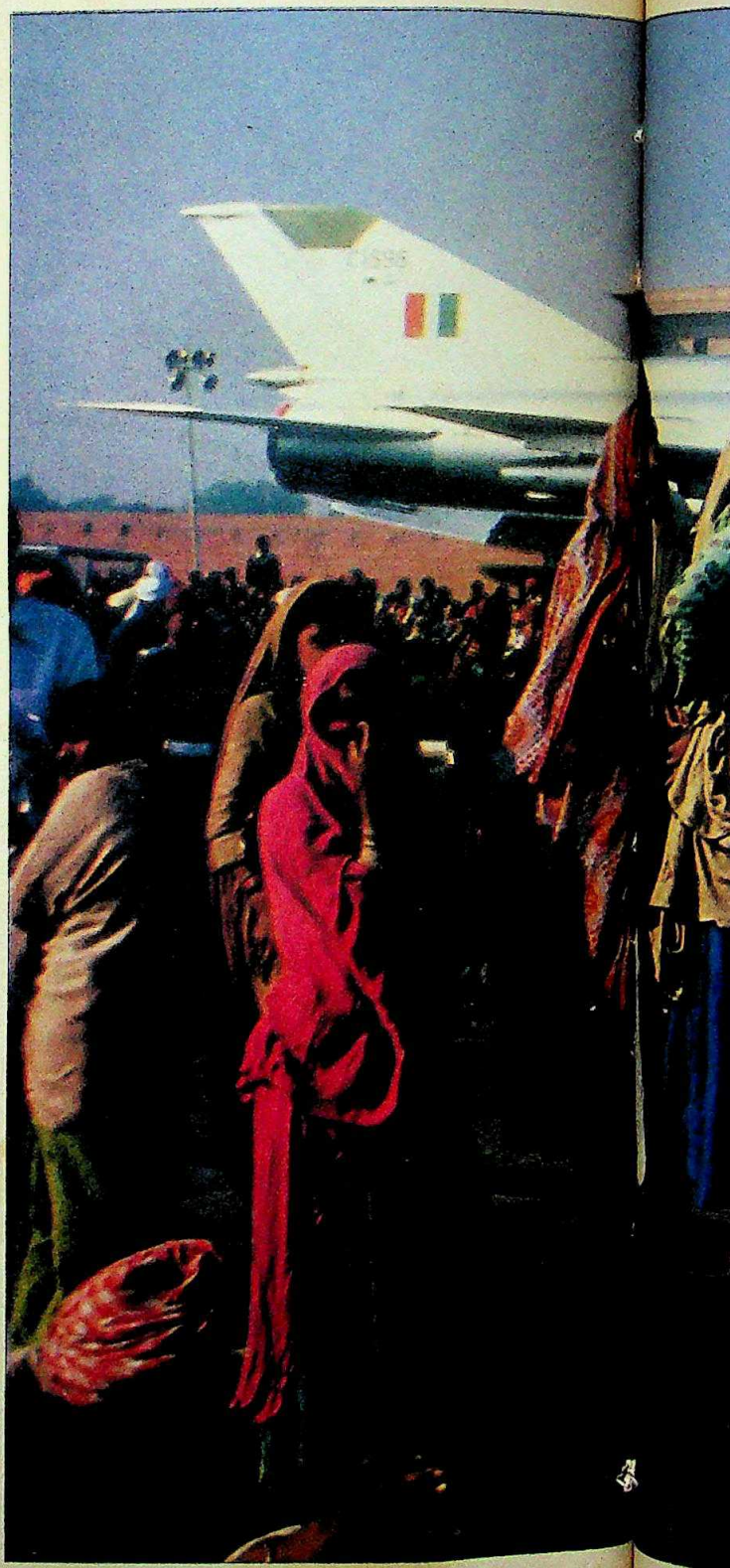

A Rajasthani belle in all her finery; and (right) Delhi's Republic Day parade

Then, suddenly, it is there. It may be an unsuspecting figure or figures wandering into the mental frame he has already conceived; a ray of sunlight or perhaps even a sudden contrast of colours or constructions. But it is a moment that is uniquely his. Instantly, the languid body is galvanised into motion as he scrambles from one spot to another in search of that rare conjunction of time and space and motion that will capture what his mind's eye already has.

Click. And one more unique portrait of life, frozen in time, is added to the many that have woven the work of Raghu Rai into a magical mosaic. It is, however, a mosaic that is definably incomplete. Rai's artistic output—and it is considerable—reflects his constant and restless search for the perfect picture or collection of pictures. His latest book titled simply *India*, is merely one more step towards that goal and not the goal itself. He may never find it. But along the way, he has produced images that are haunting in their intensity and immensely powerful in their concept.

But they are not for everyone to savour or appreciate. Rai is ranked as one of India's best photographers. Undoubtedly—and deservedly—he is. But he is also something of an enigma, part poet and part dreamer, a free spirit wandering through his own private world of artistic Bohemia where his only critic is himself.

That is perhaps a crucial flaw. When the artist transcends his art, and more important, his audience, he enters a realm of self-indulgence. Perhaps Rai can afford that luxury. But it also

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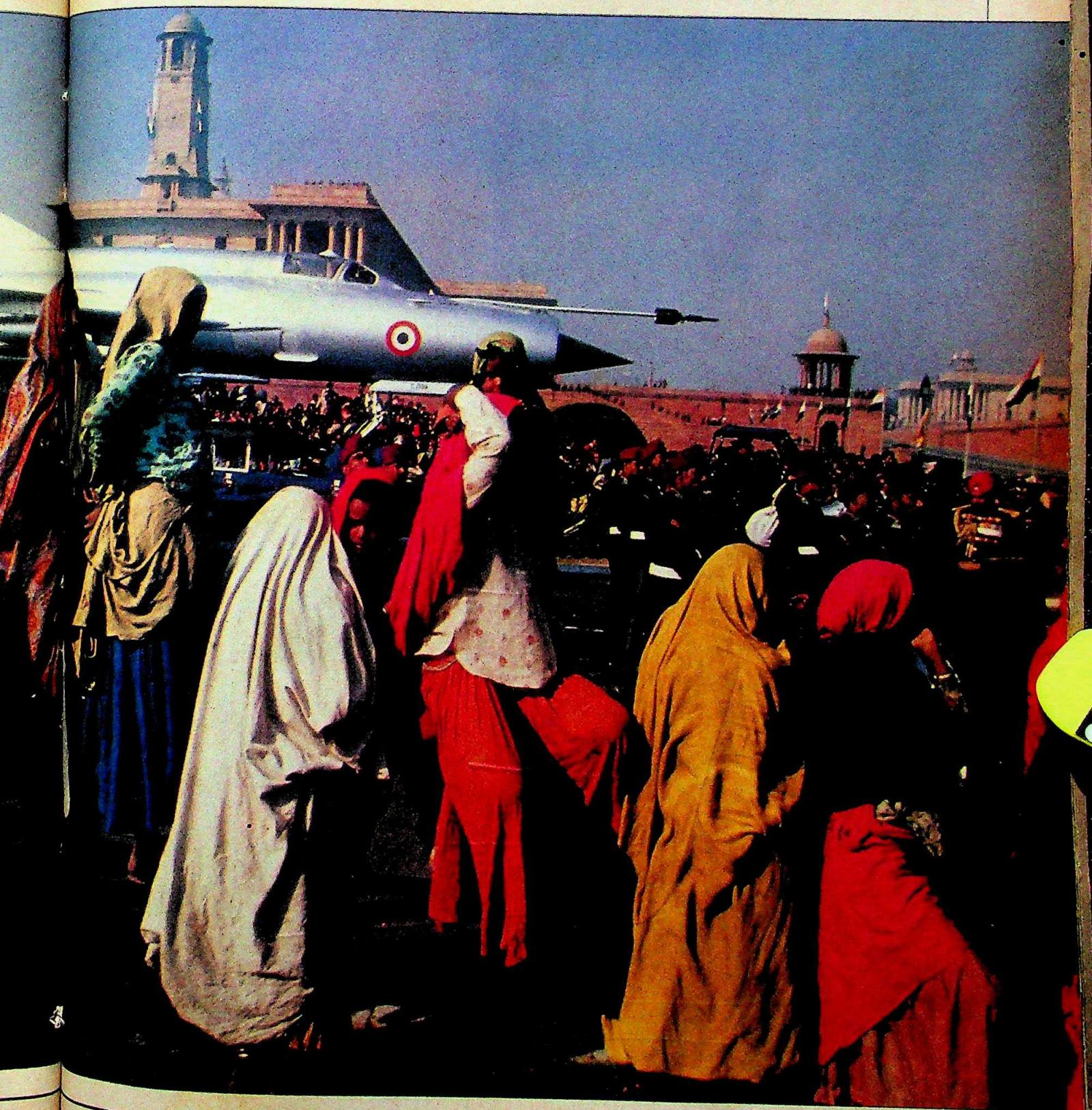

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diminishes the size of his audience and the fuller appreciation of his work.

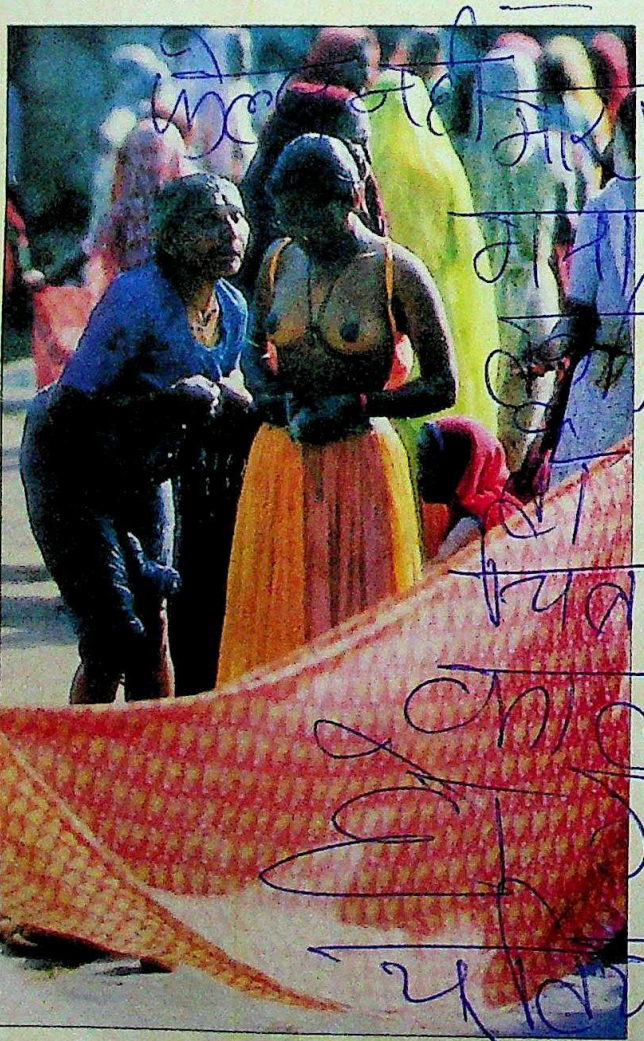
Therein lies the tragedy. Few photographers are so dedicated to their art as is Raghu Rai. Fewer still have realised or mastered its full scope and artistic ability. Many of his photographs are actually paintings, masterpieces to be framed in gilt and hung on walls of prominence.

But because he has chosen to walk alone in an independence of creativity, Rai has become an artist in search of an ethereal audience, a man who only harkens to his private muse. It is a dilemma that is perhaps equated with genius but it is also a dilemma that confronts his audience—where is the dividing line between art for art's sake and art for the artist's sake?

It is precisely that quality of artistic arrogance which has limited the appeal of Rai's work to a smaller audience than he deserves. Photography in India is still in the process of finding its own platform and much of Rai's better work has suffered by being dismissed as a coffee-table product, something to be vaguely admired and prominently displayed but not fully appreciated.

That is, of course, the supreme irony. That such talent and creativity should be consigned to an uncertain limbo; that the beauty and subtlety of his work should be dimmed merely

A young woman prepares for a purifying dip; and (right) Gujarati tribal women at a festival



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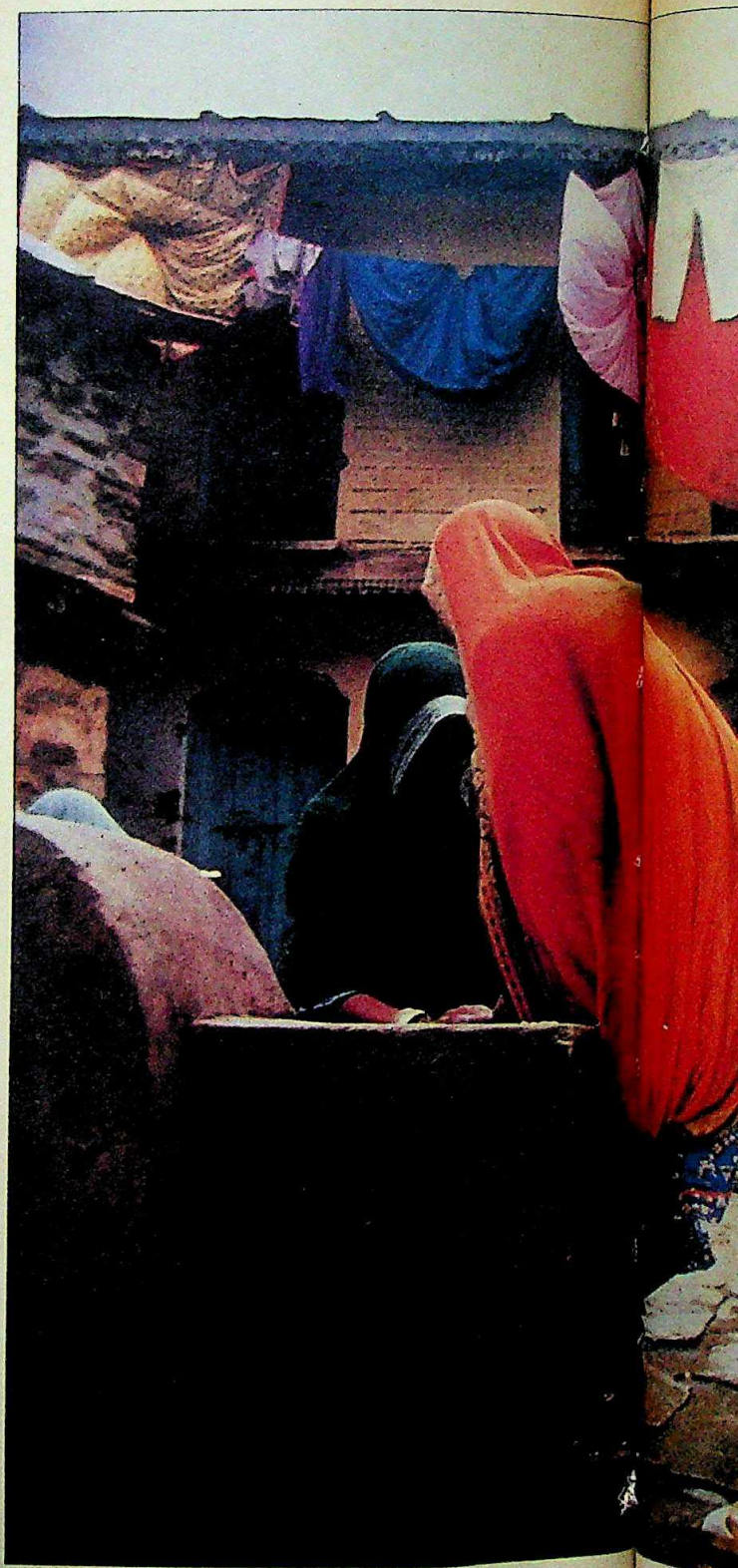

Actress Moon Moon Sen readying for her role; and (right) Hindu women on pilgrimage

because there are no real standards that have been set in Indian photography—or in its wider appreciation—to effectively measure him against.

Rai is a perfectionist. But he is also an idealist, a photographer who abides by his own artistic rules and standards. He moved away from newsphotography because of his personal disgust at the level politics and politicians had descended to. But in the process, he has also perhaps moved away from reality. Yet, in his mind, it is the rest of the world that is ignoring reality. For those who have been privileged to know the man and his methods, there is no real paradox in that.

In Rai's artistic vision, reality is beauty and colour and truth and innocence. Through the lens of his Nikon, it is these elements coming together in subtle balance that form his vision of the real India. A group of heavily-ornamented village women, coy with the camera, covering their faces with their saris as if to ward off some invisible spirit as they huddle together in front of an ancient and ornate door. One stands apart like an erect shroud, alone and yet in perfect conjunction with the rest. No painting can recreate such spontaneity and subtle harmony.

There are even more sublime expositions of the photographer's art. Perhaps the most stunning is the shot of the Republic Day parade in Delhi. In the background is the majestic facade of the seat of government. A sleek, modern fighter plane is juxtaposed between a group of villagers who have travelled down to watch the parade. Perched on a railing, they look bewildered and somewhat lost, unsure of whether to watch the passing gadgetry or gaze in awe at the surrounding city—so far removed from their own rural world. This is beauty and colour and innocence and truth.

India is easily Rai's most ambitious endeavour. His earlier books have been restricted to a solitary subject—Mother Teresa, Indira Gandhi, Delhi, the Sikhs and the Taj Mahal. Many of the photographs in the book were taken while shooting for the earlier efforts; others during the itinerant impulses that take him to every corner of this country. Taken together, they span some 20 years of Rai's best work in colour.

At times, the photographs resemble stills from one of Satyajit Ray's earlier films. The same attention to subtle detail, the raw nakedness of human emotions and the perfect if contrasting

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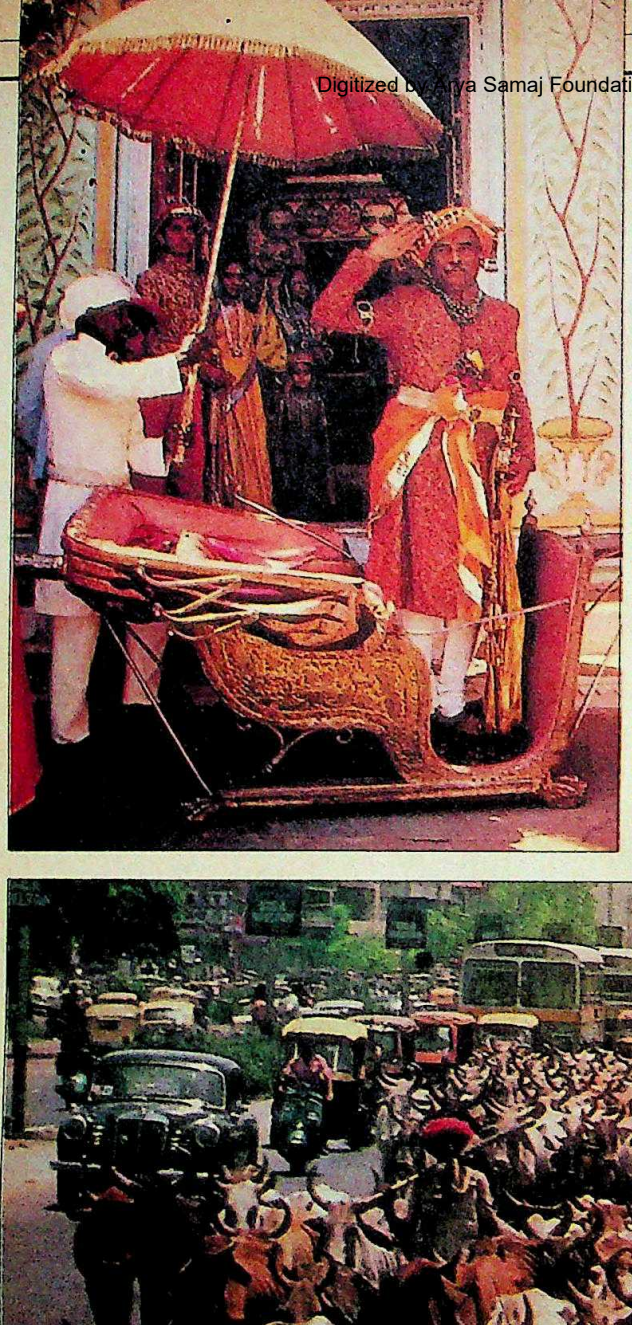

An erstwhile maharaja
re-creates his past; and (below) urban anarchy

harmony between man and nature. Much of the book covers everyday rural India, the faceless mass of village humanity—their rituals, colour and spiritual splendour that is as much a part of their lives as the earth they depend upon for survival. Through Rai's lens they acquire a rare dignity and artistry that the human eye can never see, let alone preserve in perpetuity. The sensitive introduction by former US envoy to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, though written for a foreign audience, sets the ideal tone for the photographs.

The true value of Rai's work lies in his unique ability to distance himself from the hustle of modern-day life. In the process, he sees—and allows us to see—the world through rose-tinted lens. An ordinary village woman, grime-faced and dressed in tattered clothes, pauses momentarily in the midst of her drudgery. Rai's photograph—with its subtle background of light and shade—transforms her into an object of divine beauty, something almost worshipful.

There are many who unjustly dismiss Rai as something of a showman, a photographer who shoots pretty pictures to fill the pages of books for foreigners, while turning away from the real gut issues that exercise this country. Such criticism has never bothered Rai, nor blunted his continuing efforts to capture the real India with his camera. And, judging by the selection of photographs in this book, perhaps Rai's India is more real than the one the rest of us inhabit.

—DILIP BOBB

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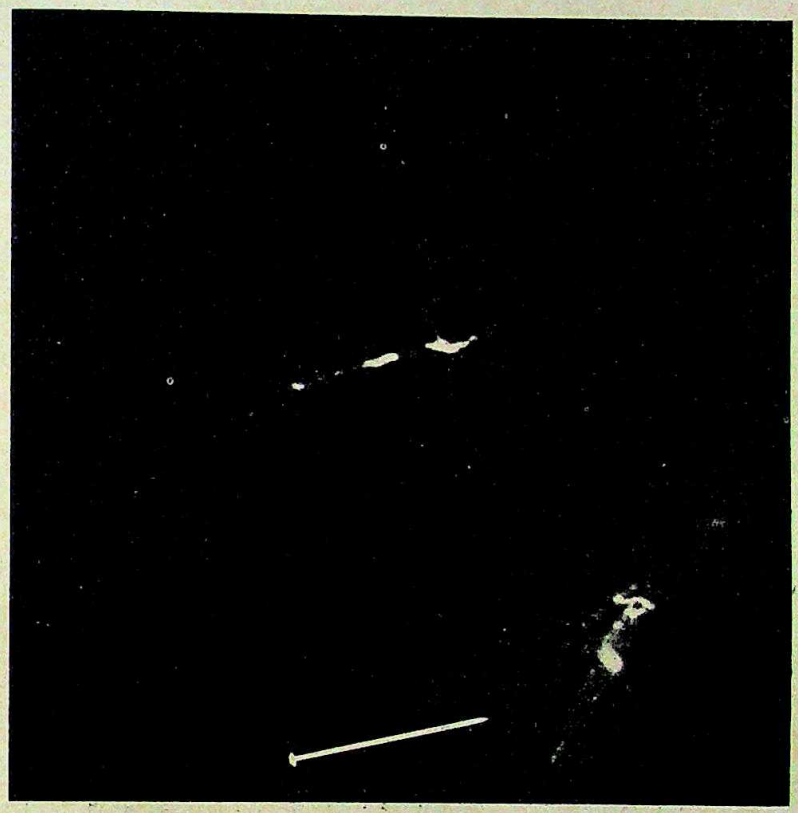

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Pariahs of the Press

WE have a caste system in newspapers that is as formidable as any that exists outside the Fourth Estate. On the lowest rung of the ladder are the sub-editors, men and women who edit copy, give headings and decide, together with the chief sub-editor, how to feature a story and how much of it to give. Totally outside the pale are the proof-readers whose job it is to ensure that no printing mistake occurs.

Any newspaper worth its name has a "style book" which lays down the law on how particular words, which can be spelt in two ways, should be spelt. It also decrees on such things as whether to say Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi or simply Rajiv Gandhi. All our newspapers are supposed to be written in British English.

Yet the havoc the caste system has played with our newspapers is there for all readers to see. Sub-editors who have any ambition seek to abandon their jobs for reporting from day one. The brighter men and women coming into the profession make a beeline for reporting jobs. Those who remain sub-editors, or chief sub-editors, are so conscious of their lowly status and lack of recognition that they often do their jobs sleep-walking.

It thus comes about that even the biggest and most respected of newspapers are full of printing and editing errors and carry news items in a brand of English that defies description. American English spellings suddenly make their appearance merely because the report is sent by Associated Press in American English.

Then there is a brand of Indian English we have almost universally accepted. We use presidentship for presidency, the archaic detenus for detainees, time-bound for time-barred (only Indian English seeks to bind time which always plays truant). The melange of Indian English, British English, American English and plain bad English is a unique contribution of our newspapers to world journalism. The violence we do to words of foreign origin would put the most brutal of men to shame.

The variety of ways in which the "Esprit d'Indian Post", which Vijaypat Singhania steered from Britain to India in record time, was spelt in our newspapers must have been a revelation to the French. I would not have thought there were so many extravagant variations of two simple French words.

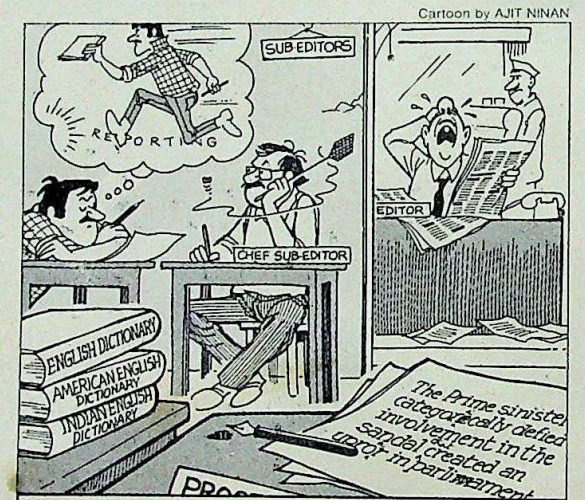
Take two passages appearing on the front pages of two of our largest newspapers. "He had apparently not heard the gunshots because of the music of his radio" (*The Times of India*). "Many states wanted a ban on non-serious candidates who contested elections only for fun and name-sake" (*The Hindustan Times*).

In terms of printing errors, it would be difficult to beat the record set by *The Statesman* on October 2. In a report on UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, the acronym was spelled as UNESCW five times and as UNESCOW once. Twice it got the organisation right.

Given the salience of American newsmagazines, English can be a confusing language. However, is it necessary for our newspapers, the biggest of them, to reflect this confusion with such abandon? We have police bursting, instead of firing, tear-gas shells all over, including in the august pages of *The Hindu*. And every so often we have vehicles "dashing against", instead of crashing into, trees.

But is it necessary to use the word "pressure" as a verb in the American fashion, instead of pressurise? Must we protest something, instead of protesting against or at something? Must we meet with people, instead of meeting them?

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN



Even the most respected of newspapers are full of editing errors, and carry items in a brand of English that defies description.

It is a remarkable phenomenon that, when our newspapers are in various stages of modernising their equipment and brightening their make-up, they should pay such little heed to the readability of what they are seeking to put across. Yet nothing is more annoying to a reader than to come up against a crop of printing errors, transposed passages and words spelt differently in the same issue of the same newspaper—for example, convener and convenor. And what kind of English will our younger readers pick up?

We cannot blame our sub-editors for adopting a cavalier attitude to their work and not bothering to consult the style book, most often in urgent need of updating. Having consigned them to the lowest level in the caste system, with little prospect of advancement or recognition, sub-editors are an unhappy lot.

Among our cleanest and best-edited newspapers today are *The Hindu* and *The Telegraph*. Unlike the once-proud *Statesman*, *The Hindu* has been able to maintain its standards, though such horrors as "speaking on the occasion" do slip in, and it has fallen victim to the lure of the American use of the word pressure.

The Telegraph, a relatively new newspaper, has been able to fire its young staff with an enviable elan and maintain a degree of professionalism. The fact that sub-editors and reporters often switch jobs helps to keep the former on their toes.

Let us, in this Nehru centenary year, resolve to make it the year of the sub-editor on our newspapers.

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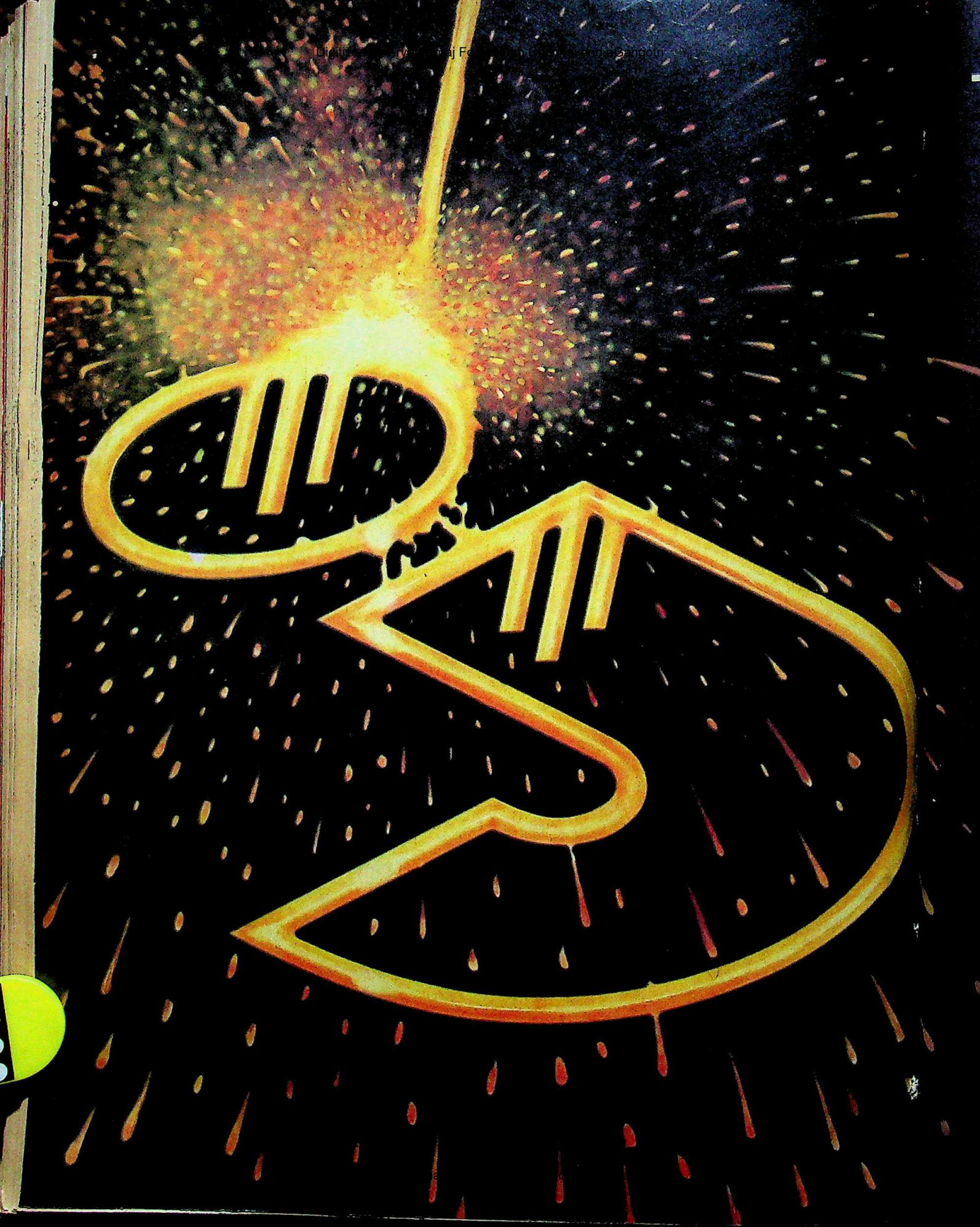

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BOMBAY FESTIVAL

A Movable Feast

Exploring the heartbreak world of the young

WHAT do you do when you are the biggest producer of films and get a chance to host an international film festival only once every decade? You either thank the Directorate of Film Festivals in India or create your own festival.

Bombay did precisely that. Last fortnight, the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA), the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB), Alliance Francaise, and the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), in association with the Bulgarian, East German, Czech, Soviet, and Japanese consulates, hosted the Bombay Film Festival (BFF). Says Ravi Gupta, general manager, NFDC: "The gaps between festivals in Bombay are too long, and the city has such an important film culture."

The idea of the BFF was born in March 1987, when the MMB and NCPA co-hosted an East-West cinema encounter which brought together film makers and critics on a common platform. Critic Chidananda Das Gupta then floated the idea of making such festivals annual. And the city's cultural organisations took it upon themselves to give Bombay's over 5,000 film buffs a movable feast of cinema for a week.

The list included all-time classics like the redoubtable Satyajit Ray's *Samapti* (part of his trilogy, *Teen Kanya*), and new, stylised films like Aditya Bhattacharya's *Raakh* from India, the quietly experimental *Walkman Blues* from Germany, Jeanne Moreau's nostalgic and pastoral *L'Adolescente* from France and Kazuki's sensitive and funny *Young Girls in Love* from Japan.

Concurrently, a seminar explored the inner world of the adolescent, with participants like Lutz Konermann from the Federal Republic of Germany (whose *Aufdermauer* and *Black and Without Sugar* were screened at the festival), Philippe Lenglet of the French Embassy in Delhi, sociologist Veena Das, critic Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Federation of Film Societies of India's Pankaj Butalia, and theatre exponent Mohan Agashe. Said Bhattacharya: "It (adolescence) is not a comfortable time, but it is the best way to be. It is the time of the first shave and the first kiss. It is also the time for the first love and sometimes the first heartbreak."

Pointing out the punk youth of Paris, Patrick Beck, director, Alliance Francaise de Bombay, says: "You may admire the creativity that goes into their headgear but it also shows their anguish of (lack of) identity."

The Indian adolescent, in contrast, lives in a much more happier world than his western counterpart. Beck says: "He smiles more, he has less auto-destructive identity problems to cope with."

The films underscore the theme repeatedly: Meera Nair's celebrated *Salaam Bombay* salutes the sheer guts of Bombay's vagrant children. Ray's *Samapti* is about a petulant Mrinmoyee preferring the careless abandon of childhood to the structured existence of being a housewife, only to relent later. Naren Shakhnazarov's *Messenger Boy* is about life seen through the eyes of a city courier boy.

Ketan Mehta's *Holi* comments on the destructive capabilities latent in India's urban hostel youth while Prakash Jha's *Hip Hip Hurray* is "*The Dirty Dozen*" all over again. Veteran screen-writer Nabendu Ghosh's *Trishagni* is about the rigid orthodoxy of a religious order imposed upon young lovers.

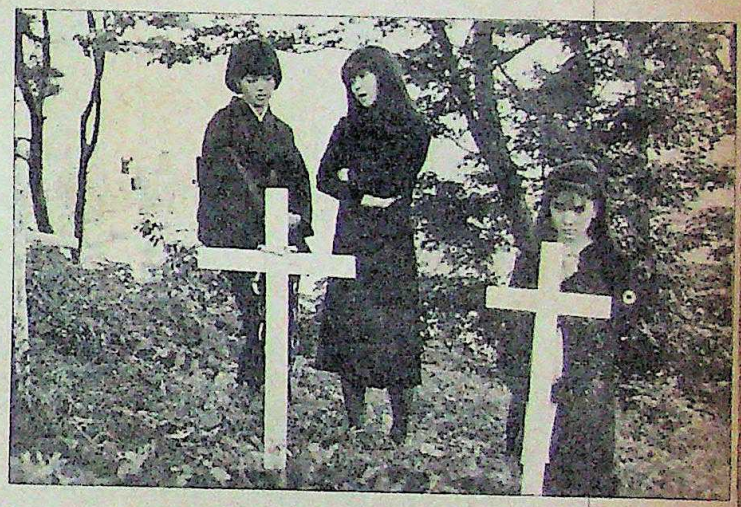
And Konermann's *Black and Without Sugar* is a fresh look at a travelling theatre company of young people. His *Aufdermauer*, in contrast, is a sympathetic look at a young man sentenced to life imprisonment. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Anantram* confronts the viewer of the film with a choice between reality and fantasy.

BFF is an exciting idea and Beck, who'd like an even greater involvement from the city with the festival, is sanguine about making it like Cannes in the long run. Asks he: "Why shouldn't Bombay's starved film buffs be enthralled by a feast of movies?"

—SALIL TRIPATHI

Stills from *Raakh* (below) and *Young Girls in Love*

VINESH GANDHI



Starved of festivals Bombay's film buffs have organised a week-long fete of the best movies on the pangs of growing up.

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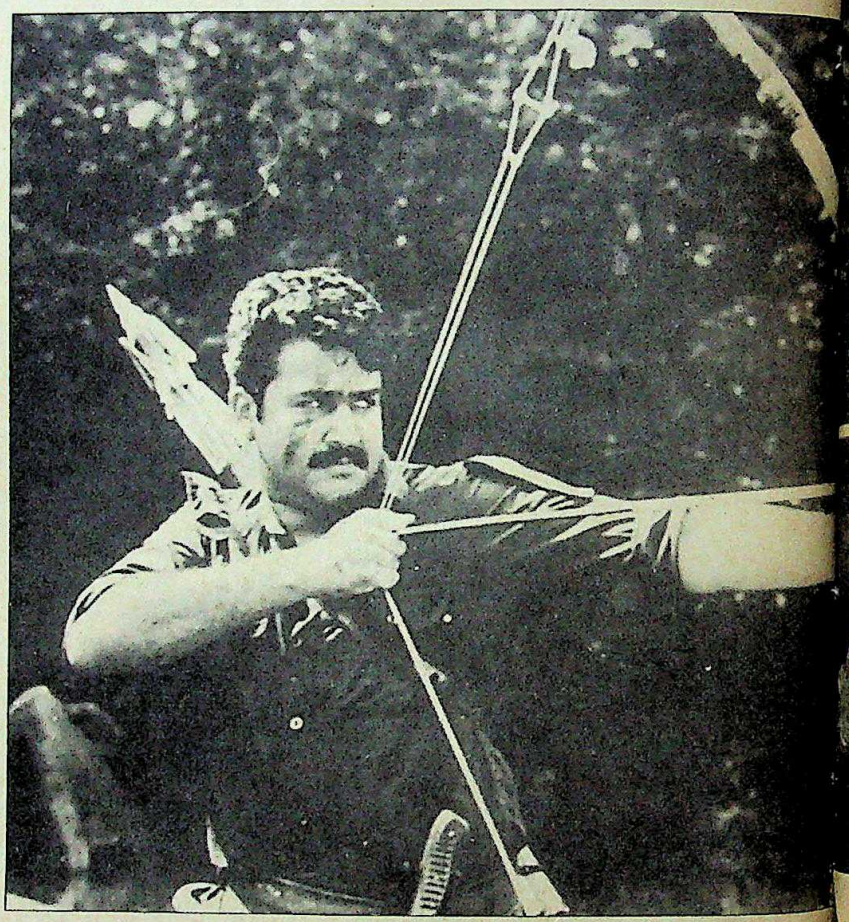
MALAYALAM FILMS

Celluloid Sultans of Kerala

Mammootty and Mohan Lal emerge as unprecedented superstars



THEY are the *deus ex machina* the Malayalam film industry has been waiting for. Ever since the first Malayalam film was put together 50 years ago the industry has been craving for superheroes who would step out of the screen into the collective consciousness of the people. While elsewhere in the country the MGRs, the NTRs, the Dilip Kumars and the Raj Kapoors were playing out fantasies and ferrying the audience to two-hour utopias, Malayalam films had to make do with ordinary heroes. Those like Satyan whose theatrical acumen was unchallenged and Prem Nazir who mocked at time and acted in nearly 600 films wavered at the threshold of superstardom and never really got to occupy the tinsel throne.

But finally it seems the waiting is over. For the last few years the industry has been dominated by two actors Mammootty, 38, and Mohan Lal, 28, who have now metamorphosed into superstars. So impregnable is their hold over the industry today that new films are launched only if they have the time. The top dream merchants of the industry see to it that the characters are created according to the diktats of these superstars. And as in the case of the recent release *1921*, even history has been tinged with an overdose of fantasy to suit the image of Mammootty who plays the lead role of Khader, a legendary hero who took part in the historic Moplah rebellion.

Says leading director I.V. Sasi who first burst into the industry with *Avalude Ravukal* (Her Nights): "Even Prem Nazir could never whip up such passions like Mammootty and Mohan Lal. In the case of these two it is a rare and right mixture of charisma and acting ability."

The highly cinema-conscious Malayalee film-goer who has till now not been swayed by the charm and power of film actors have now started forming film clubs—there are over 100 Mammootty and Mohan Lal film clubs in the state—and queuing up for any movie which has the magical names. Last month in Trichur on the opening day of Lal's *Moonam Mura* (Third Technique) at least 15 fans were injured in a stampede. In Perinthalmanna about 70 kilometres from Calicut, Nafeesat Beevi, 48, saw Mammootty's *1921* a dozen times just to hear his soul-stirring dialogues. Each theatre has to pay an advance of up to Rs 2 lakh interest free if they want to screen a superstar film. Ramshackle theatres in villages are giving from Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 as advance. During the recent dharna organised by the Malayalam film industry in front of the state secretariat in Trivandrum to protest against sales tax and power tariff hikes, almost the entire staff of the secretariat left their files to rush out for a glimpse of the superheroes. Both of them had to be whisked away in a police jeep to prevent them from being mauled by delerious fans. Of the five mega-hits which collected over a crore in the last two years, four had either Lal or Mammootty.

The other recent release which shattered box-office records is the refreshingly new movie *Vaisali*, a tale from the Mahabharata, directed by Bharatan who pioneered the middle cinema movement in Kerala. Even here the lead actors—Sanjay and Swoparnika—were brought in from Bombay, showing the dearth of talent in the state. There's no one in sight to challenge the hegemony of Lal and Mammootty. Among the most promising of the actors who have dared to flex their theatrical muscle against the superstars is Jayaram who was introduced by director Padmaraja. His latest film *Witness* is a hit but he many other producers will back him to be seen. The other aspirant Sukumaran chandra Menon seems to have given

Has the Malayalee finally fallen prey to the hero-worship syndrome? Will th

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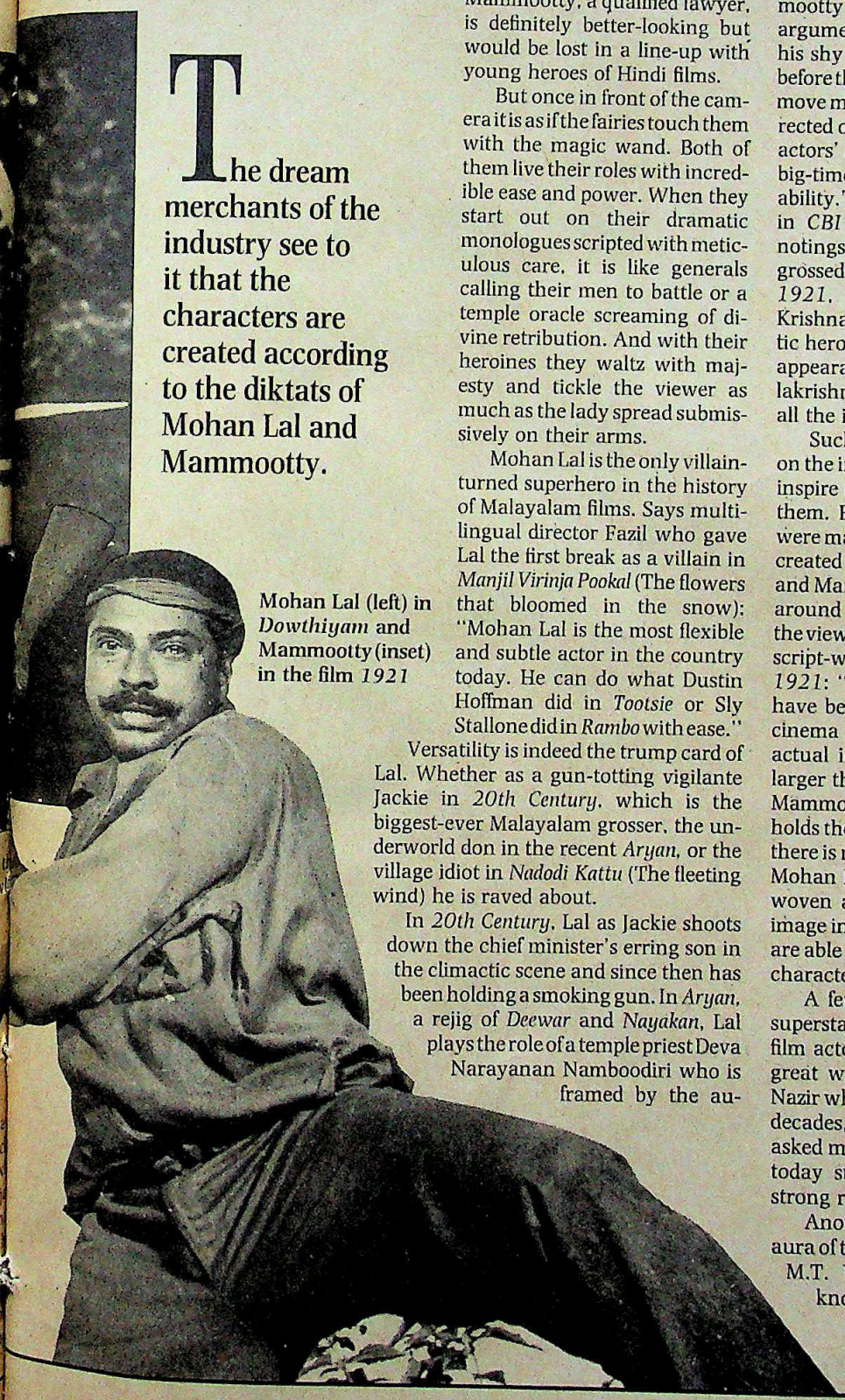
...o superstars be deified like their counterparts in neighbouring states. MGR and ...R? Says noted novelist and former ...reaucrat Malayatoor Ramakrishnan: ...am ashamed that Malayalees are falling ...ctims to the star charisma. About 10 ...ars back Prem Nazir would have ...alked into the state secretariat unnoticed. Today Mammootty and Mohan Lal can create traffic jams wherever they go in the state."

Yet neither of them has at first glance the presence, gait or swoon-inducing good looks—the trappings of the Indian superhero. Mohal Lal has a chubby face and the build of a prosperous trader. Mammootty, a qualified lawyer, is definitely better-looking but would be lost in a line-up with young heroes of Hindi films.

The dream merchants of the industry see to it that the characters are created according to the diktats of Mohan Lal and Mammootty.



Mohan Lal (left) in *Dowthiyam* and Mammootty (inset) in the film *1921*

But once in front of the camera it is as if the fairies touch them with the magic wand. Both of them live their roles with incredible ease and power. When they start out on their dramatic monologues scripted with meticulous care, it is like generals calling their men to battle or a temple oracle screaming of divine retribution. And with their heroines they waltz with majesty and tickle the viewer as much as the lady spread submissively on their arms.

Mohan Lal is the only villain-turned superhero in the history of Malayalam films. Says multilingual director Fazil who gave Lal the first break as a villain in *Manjil Virinja Pookal* (The flowers that bloomed in the snow): "Mohan Lal is the most flexible and subtle actor in the country today. He can do what Dustin Hoffman did in *Tootsie* or Sly Stallone did in *Rambo* with ease."

Versatility is indeed the trump card of Lal. Whether as a gun-totting vigilante Jackie in *20th Century*, which is the biggest-ever Malayalam grosser, the underworld don in the recent *Aryan*, or the village idiot in *Nadodi Kattu* (The fleeting wind) he is raved about.

In *20th Century*, Lal as Jackie shoots down the chief minister's erring son in the climactic scene and since then has been holding a smoking gun. In *Aryan*, a rejig of *Deewar* and *Nayakan*, Lal plays the role of a temple priest Deva Narayanan Namboodiri who is framed by the authorities on trumped up charges. From the mantra-chanting atmosphere the priest flees to Bombay and becomes an underworld don. How else could Lal be given a gun?

Mammootty on the other hand isn't as versatile but can carry any film by sheer artistry and powerful expressions. Mammootty's clenched fists, his passionate argument for the underdog in court and his shy half smile as he drops hints just before the heroine drops her sari *pallav* can move many a mind. Says Sasi who has directed over 100 films: "Mammootty is an actors' actor. He has graduated into the big-time only because of his acting ability." His role as a CBI officer Perumal in *CBI oru diary kurrippu* (CBI's diary notings) which like Lal's *20th Century* grossed over Rs 2 crore, as Khader in *1921*, as an investigative journalist Krishnamurthy in *New Delhi*, as a romantic hero in countless movies and his first appearance in an art film—Adoor Gopalakrishnan's esoteric *Anantharam*—have all the insignia of the classic actor.

Such is the grip of these two superstars on the industry and the viewers that they inspire the creation of characters to suit them. Earlier, works of leading writers were made into films. Now characters are created to suit the image and whims of Lal and Mammootty and patterns are woven around them to produce a tapestry that the viewers heap accolades on. Says noted script-writer Damodaran who created *1921*: "A few years back history could have been told as it was in Malayalam cinema but today I have to weave an actual incident in masala form with a larger than life character for the sake of Mammootty." Director K.G. George also holds the view that in Malayalam cinema there is no story line. "People come to see Mohan Lal or Mammootty, so a story is woven around them keeping their star image in mind. But both are talented and are able to give some life to the cardboard characters they portray," he asserts.

A few years back, before the era of superstardom dawned on the industry, film actors were pawns in the hands of great writers and directors. Says Prem Nazir whose reign at the top spanned two decades, rather enviously: "I have never asked my directors the story of films. But today stars will only act if they have strong roles."

Another instance of the clout and aura of the superstars is the fact that even M.T. Vasudevan Nair, Kerala's best known writer and the highest paid script-writer has turned around stories from the folklore of the

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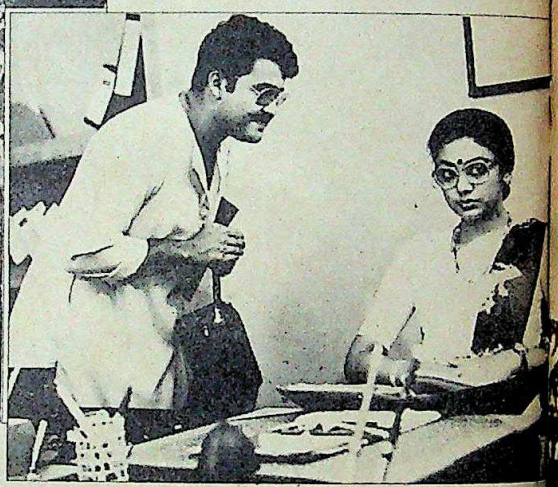
northern Malabar region (*Vadakan pattu*) in his latest creation *Vadakan Veeragatha* (a tale of bravery from the north). Chandu who was the villain in earlier films based on folklore is in the latest avatar the anti-hero, of course, to suit Mammootty.

The superstars have cast their spell across the border too. Mammootty especially is a darling of the Tamil viewers, perhaps because he offers something more than the gimmicks of Rajnikanth and the theatrics of Kamalahasan. Earlier Tamil Nadu offered a market only for the soft-porn Malayalam movies, but Mammootty's *CBI* ran for a whopping 35 weeks in the prestigious Safire theatre in Madras. The same producer Mani's new film *August 1* with Mammootty sold in Tamil Nadu for Rs 13 lakh when even a soft-porn fetches only around Rs 2 lakh.



Mammootty as Khader in *1921* (left) and Mohan Lal with Shobana: versatile

THE superheroes have, however, spawned envy and enmity. There is a feeling in the industry that these two stars give dates only to big banners. Says actor-director Balachandra Menon: "These guys think that they click only if they have a certain combination of favourable directors and story writers. Why can't they act with little known or new directors?" When confronted with these charges Mammootty said: "I don't think just Mammootty or Mohan Lal can make a film a super-hit by their mere presence. It is the overall combination of the story and presentation that makes it a hit." There is an element of truth in it because all that the superstars have touched has not become gold. Lal's *Padamudra* (Foot print) recently crashed at the box office and Mammooty's *1921* is not doing as well as expected.

But ironically the golden dawn of superstardom has brought with it the spectre of recession. Alarmists have already sounded the death knell of the industry. In 1985 nearly 130 films were churned out of the studios based mostly in Madras. In 1986 the number came down to 110 and in 1987 it dropped to a pathetic 89 and this year only 61 films will be released.

Many feel that the industry is caught in a vicious circle with the producers waiting for the superstars and the stars waiting for the right story, the right amount of money (each reportedly get over Rs 3 lakh per film) and the right banner. In 1985 when Mammootty had not yet planted himself at the pinnacle, he acted in an incredible 35 films while this year he has done only 15.

Says popular director Joshi: "Prem Nazir used to shoot for three films a day while Mammootty and Mohan Lal do only one film at a time. So they cannot dole out dates to everybody and some producers would prefer not to make a film without them. This is one of the main reasons for the fall in production."

Mammootty says he has become choosy fearing over-exposure. "Tell me one good book in Malayalam literature in recent times. I agree some of my films are inspired by foreign books and films. But we don't lift every scene. Only the base of the story is taken and transformed to suit our taste." Lal tends to believe in sterotypes and says: "*Padamudra* was a flop and my directors say that I should have had a gun in my hand." Lal, however agrees that the gun does not always trigger hits out of its barrel but nevertheless is a safe proposition for producers.

But the blame for spiralling costs has been laid squarely on the shoulders of the superstars. Two years back the production cost of a big star movie used to be around Rs 23 lakh. Today a superstar movie by the time it unwinds on a screen costs Rs 35 lakh to Rs 40 lakh. *1921* has reportedly cost over Rs 1.20 crore to produce.

Says Balachandra Menon: "How can they ever recover their cost in a state where there are hardly 600 cinema theatres. It is very rare for an average Malayalam film to collect more than Rs 60 lakh." Menon feels that the only panacea is the low budget film. His latest *Kandathum Ketatthum* (What was seen and heard) made at a cost of Rs 15 lakh is a safe proposition even if it does average business. But young director Priyadarshan disagrees: "People cannot be fooled any longer with half-baked films which try to compromise on cost. We have to give them a certain amount of gloss for the product to sell."

Notwithstanding the barbs aimed at them and the looming clouds of recession Mammootty and Mohan Lal are "making hay while the sun shines" as director Fazil says. But how long can the industry afford to make mega-budget glossies? And moreover considering the transitory nature of superstardom, will there be a sudden crash?

Such doubts apart, even the most hardened of cynics would agree that Lal and Mammootty have yanked Malayalam cinema out of its drab, dreary settings with sterotyped roles and catapulted it to the heady reaches of glitter, mega-money, epic sets and riveting stars.

—SREEDHAR PILLAI

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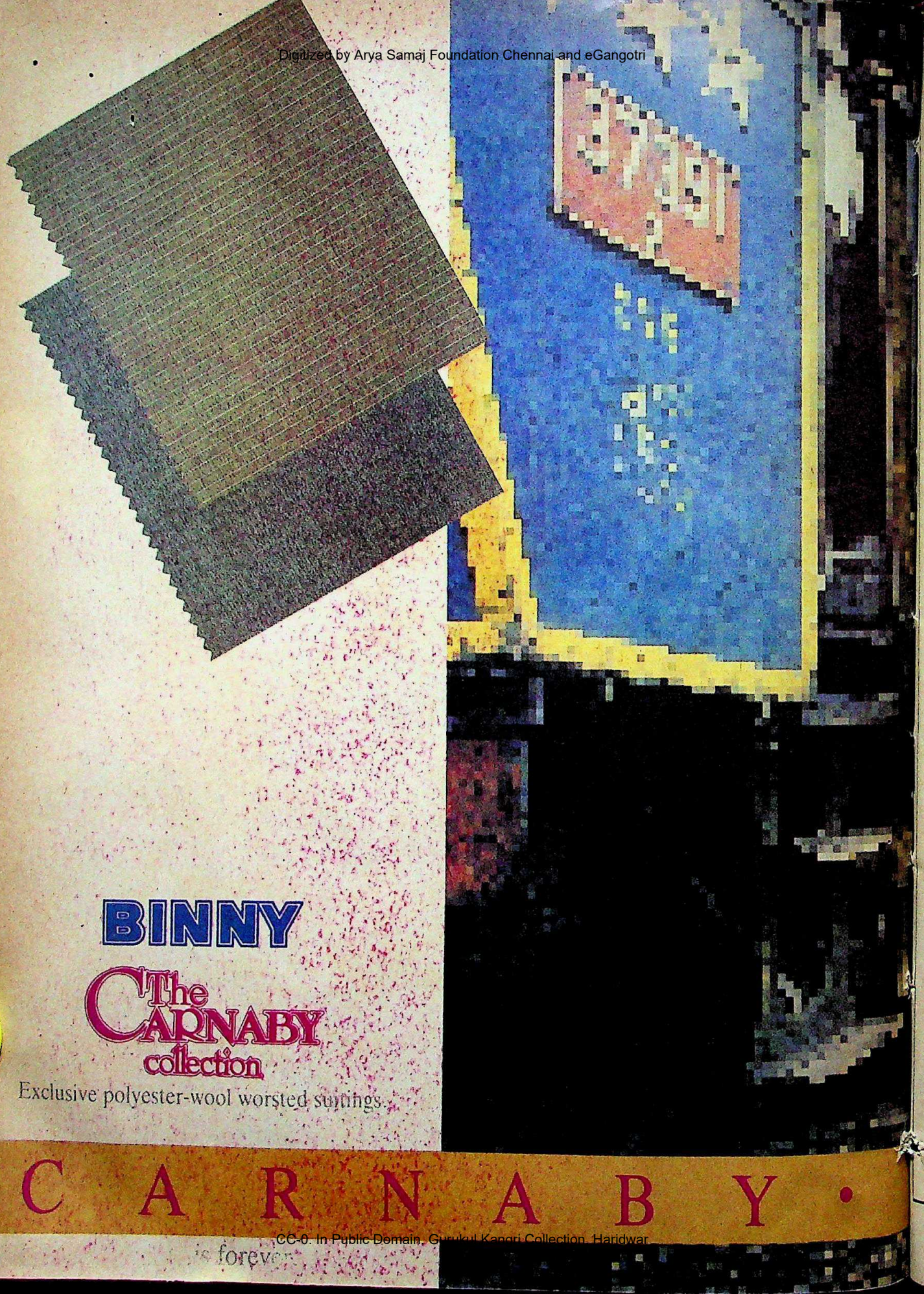

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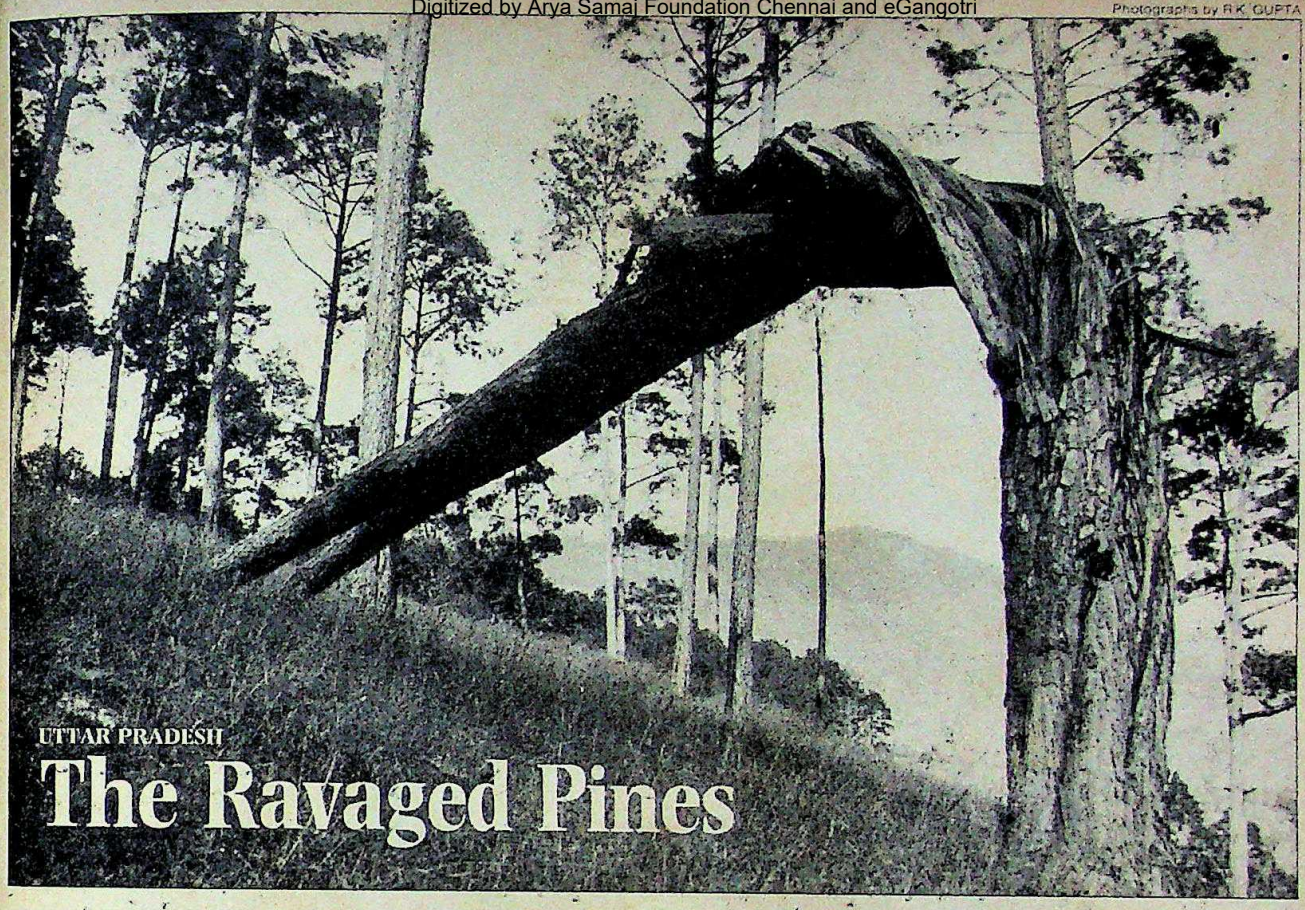

UTTAR PRADESH

The Ravaged Pines

A towering pine tree with its trunk completely charred, standing pathetically near the road to Balsar in the exquisite Almora district of Uttar Pradesh's Himalayan region, tells it all. For nearly three decades now, the pine trees of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh have been ruthlessly ravaged by resin collectors. The majestic evergreens, with their trunks blazed and stripped of their bark, are easily uprooted by lashing winds. The result: pine forests which made up 80 per cent of the green cover of Uttar Pradesh in 1960 now form only 64 per cent. And the forest cover in the state has fallen from 20 per cent in 1952 to 11 per cent. Today it would be impossible to identify a single young pine in the forests of Binsar, Kausani or Ranikhet, which has not been tapped for resin.

It is not so much the deforestation or illegal felling of trees which has harmed the pine forests as the reckless resin tapping which, despite the norms drawn up by the Forest Department, has been going on unabated. The Forest Department is not to be entirely blamed for the situation for it did frame strict rules for scientific tapping of resin. What it forgot to provide was an infrastructure to enforce them. Says a senior forest official: "Even if there is a hundred-rupee note lying in the state's treasury, armed policemen guard it round the clock. But for forests worth crores and crores, we have been provided one forest guard who usually carries only a *danda* (stick) and that too obtained by cutting a branch of a tree." The complaint sounds credible but the problem is not just one of appointing Sten gun-toting guards.

The Forest Department has laid down strict rules but has no means to enforce them.

Says Keshav Desi Raju, the young district magistrate of Almora: "Resin tapping is a major livelihood for the people in the hills. There has now emerged a dangerous nexus of influential people and villagers involved in illegal tapping of resin." Though not many cases of illicit tapping are recorded officially, both district and forest officials admit that the practice is widespread. Says Raju: "It is not possible to keep a constant watch. Even when specific complaints are investigated, only people at the bottom are caught. The real offenders, the ones who employ them and thrive on this business, have enough clout politically and otherwise to go scot-free."

The stakes are high in the *lisa* (local name for resin) trade. The Forest Department pays Rs 250 to Rs 350 per quintal to the private contractors, whereas the open market price is Rs 750 to Rs 950. The risks in the illegal trade of resin are minimal. The contractors get the work done through local people. Blazes deeper than that allowed by law, done on a thousand young trees in a forest which has lakhs of them, will either go unnoticed or be ignored by the Forest Department's field staff. But one such illegal blaze in each of the thousand trees would yield 2 kg to 4 kg of resin a month or a profit of Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh a year.

Tapping pine trees is a simple process. All one needs is a *basula* (a modified version of the carpenter's adze), a cone-shaped steel cup, and a small, sharp metal plate. The tree trunk's bark is scraped with the *basula* and then a blaze (removing the sap wood) is made. The

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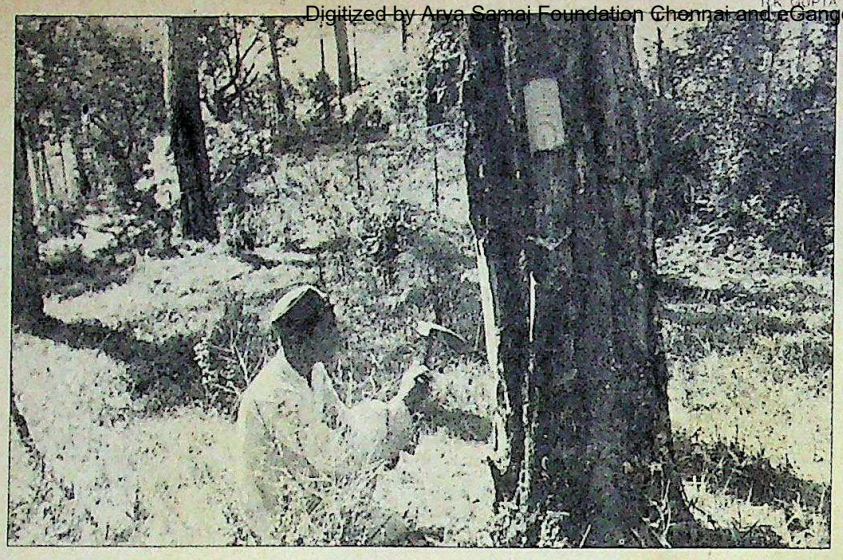

metal plate is driven into the tree trunk to puncture the resin ducts. The cone-shaped cup is tied below this plate and after a couple of hours resin starts flowing into the cup which is emptied once a week. The process continues till the resin ducts in this portion of the tree dry up. A fresh resin duct is then tapped in the same blaze.

Only the locals are caught. The contractors who hire them for illegal tapping have enough clout to go scot-free.

The official figures provide only a glimpse of the extent of resin tapping. The Forest Department procures 13,000 to 15,000 tonnes of resin annually which would easily mean a revenue of around Rs 5 crore. According to unofficial estimates, the resin trade turnover would be more than Rs 10 crore to 12 crore annually in Almora district alone. Says Mukti Dutta, 26, an environmentalist who is the secretary of the Paryavaran Janjagran Samiti: "At least 70 per cent of the pine trees have been tapped for resin and 90 per cent of the tapping is illegally done in connivance with the Forest Department staff." Anjana Dutta, divisional forest officer of Almora (East), denies this vehemently: "Illegal tapping would not be more than 10 per cent by any estimate." But sheer physical evidence of the devastation belies this claim.

In 1976 when resin tapping was nationalised, the Forest Department framed certain norms in order to regulate the activity and keep the trees from harm. Explains Anjana Dutta: "If done scientifically, resin tapping would not cause even the slightest harm to the pine trees." Before nationalisation, trees with a diameter of even 30 cms were tapped by the Forest Department but after nationalisation, a limit of 35 cm was fixed. A tree with a 35-cm diameter would be 70 to 80 years old whereas its life span ranges between 100 and 120 years.

Only one channel in a tree is tapped for five years and a fresh blaze is made in the same channel every year. The Forest Department prescribes that the length of the blaze should not exceed 67.5 cm in the first year and 37.5 cm in each of the subsequent four years. And the length of the channel in a tree should not exceed 217.5 cm for the five years it's tapped. A fresh channel has to be made in an anticlockwise direction 3 cm away from the first channel for the next five years. The depth of each blaze should not exceed 2.5 cm.

TO regulate the tapping activity, the Forest Department has formulated a system of registering 'mates' (contractors) who would tap the trees and pass on the yield to the department. These mates have to furnish tenders to the department for tapping the trees in a particular coupe (a group of trees to be tapped) in which they quote the yield they will get from one blaze on a tree. This yield is usually 1.5 to 3 kg per blaze. The Forest Department fixes the yield for the particular mate by calculating his average yield for the previous three years. The department buys the resin from the mates for prices ranging between Rs 250 and Rs 350 per quintal depending on the yield provided by the mate. The Forest Department also prescribes a particular type of adze known as the 'Joshi *basula*' for the tapping.

In practice, hardly any rule is observed. Most of the mates are influential people in their areas and many of them are active local politicians. The corruption starts at the very beginning of the tapping season when the trees to be tapped are identified. The identification is done by the village patwari or the forester who verifies the number of trees available to be tapped and also the estimated yield. Both the figures are inflated at this level to suit the mates. If the mates violate any of the norms and are caught in the process by senior officials, the maximum penalty prescribed is Rs 1.75 per quintal of the illegally obtained resin, which is a pittance compared with the rich profits that the resin fetches in the open market.

Not surprisingly, most of the tapped pine trees have deep blazes or blazes all around them in defiance of the rules. To conceal the deep blazes, the mates and the forest staff have developed ingenious techniques. Once the trees are completely tapped—rendering them useless for resin tapping for years together—they are simply burnt down. This gives rise to jungle fires that break out with stunning regularity.

The 32 resin factories situated either inside the forests or on their fringes have contributed handsomely to the illegal tapping of resin. All the factories are privately owned and provide ready markets for the illegal resin. Says Mukti Dutta: "There are only two ways of dealing with the problem. The first is to ban resin tapping for five years so that the trees can revive and the second is to nationalise the resin factories."

Triloki Chand Rekhi, owner of Ranikhet's prestigious West View Hotel—he has been running the establishment for 30 years—recalls the big pine forest fire of 1985 which came dangerously close to the hotel: "Such fires might be profitable for some people but for most of the residents they are the biggest threat now." He points out that, notwithstanding official statistics, more than 40 per cent of the forests in the area have disappeared. Those which remain are rapidly falling victim to uncontrolled resin tapping.

It's a classic case of venality—slaying the goose that lays the golden eggs.

—DILIP AWASTHI in Almora

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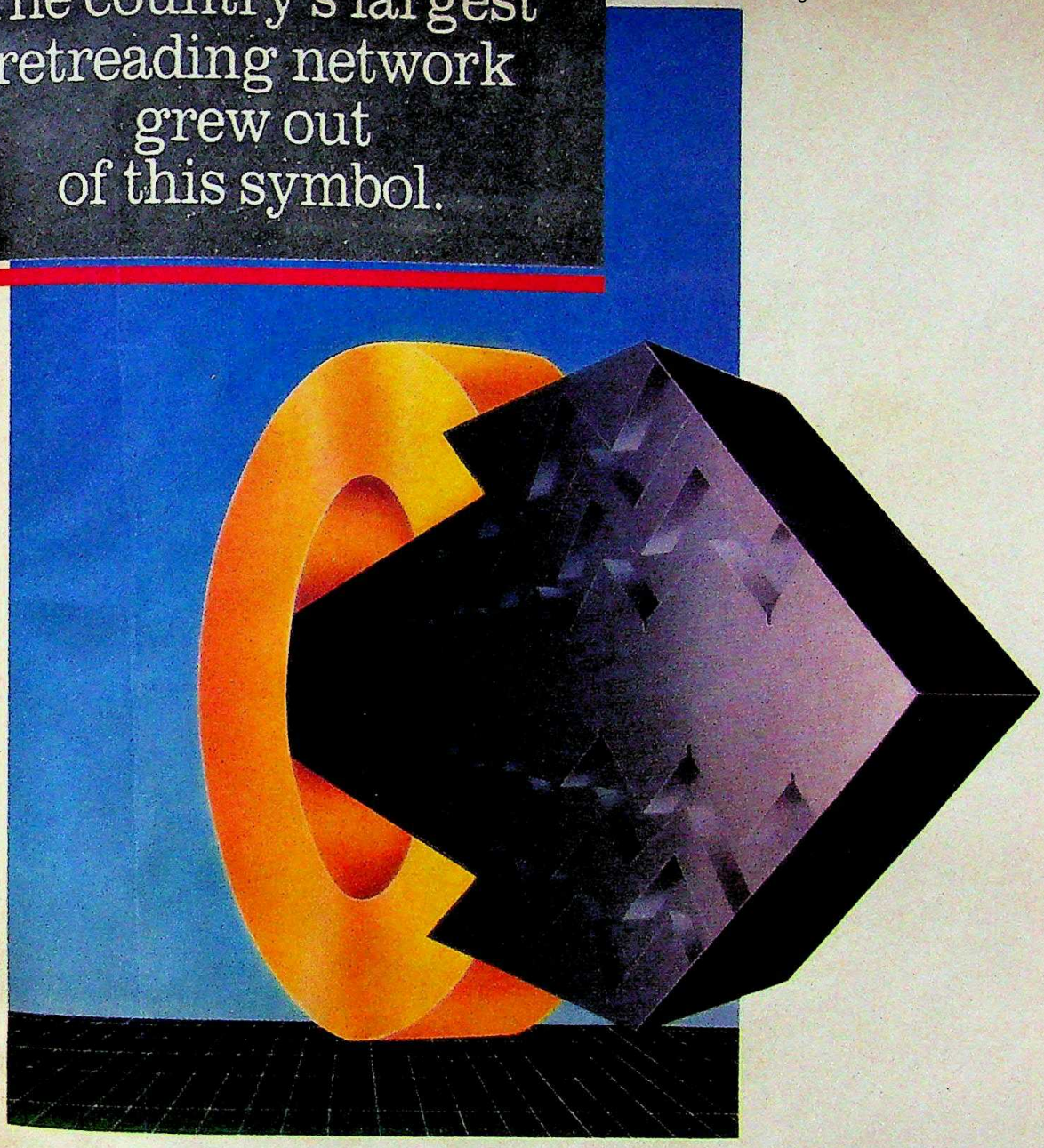

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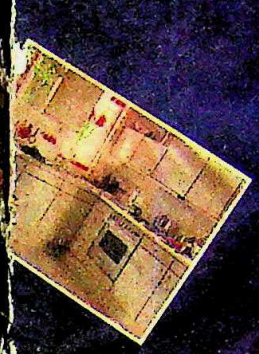

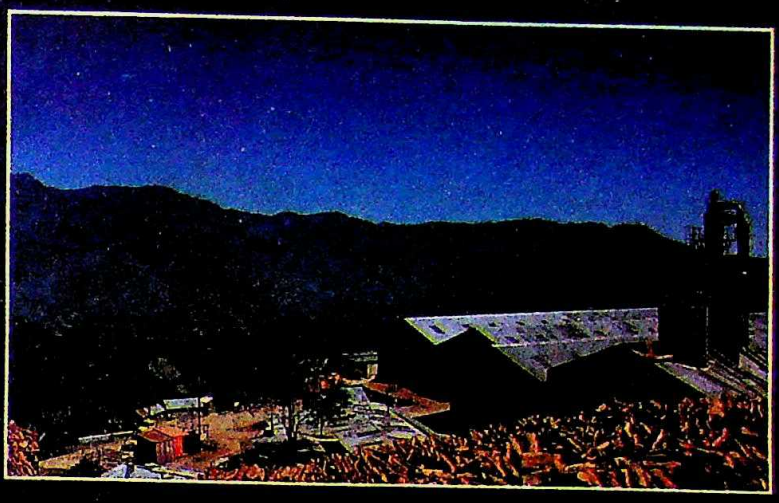

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Zeenat: second coming

◆ Her little bundle of joy has proved more than a handful—and a bit of a drag. After playing the doting and domesticated mother for two long years, **Zeenat Aman** is back where she belongs—in tinsel town. The original Bohemian of Bollywood has signed up for Vivek Vaswani's courtroom drama, *Gawaahi*, based on Ayn Rand's popular play, *Night of January 16*, opposite Kabir Bedi. "I took up this offer because it appealed to my imagination," said Zeenat. "But my days as a full time actress are over." Who knows? Everybody is entitled to a second childhood.

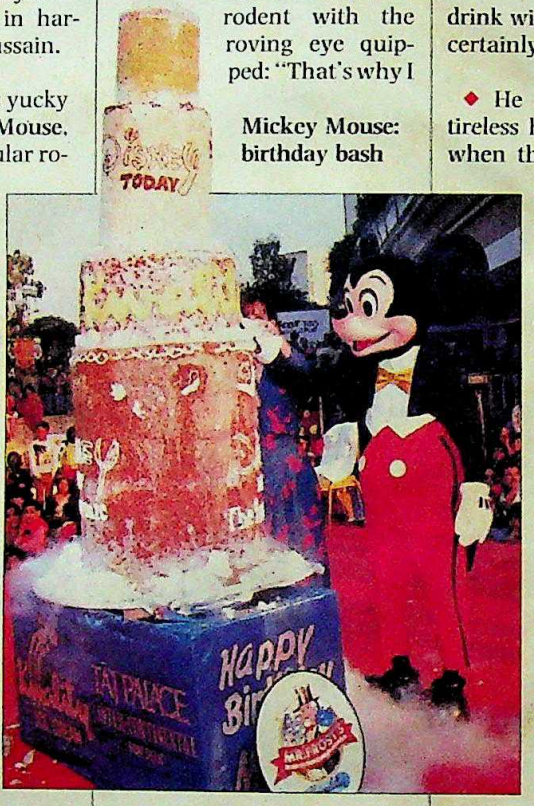
◆ It was literally the performing arts. In a rare artistic duet in Bombay last week, sarod maestro **Amjad Ali Khan** and painter-sculptor **B. Vithal** blended their special talents to give a unique demonstration of the art of *jugalbandi*. In the space of 50 minutes, while the ustad was lost in the depths of Raag *Zila Kafi*, the painter captured him and his moods on canvas. "The music was very inspiring and I enjoyed painting Amjad Ali," said Vithal. The 5.5 by 4.5 ft oils—a profile of Amjad Ali's and an abstract—will go towards the Hunger Project. Next year, Vithal will perform an encore—for charity once again—at London's Royal Albert Hall, this time in harmoney with Zakir Hussain.

Vithal painting Amjad Ali

◆ Rats! What's this yucky stuff! That's **Mickey Mouse**, the world's most popular rodent, nibbling Indian cheeses in Delhi and causing a sensation on his 60th birthday bash in India last fortnight.

As Disneyland's official host, shaking hands with 8,000-odd excited children and their parents was, well, child's play.

Even a mouse's birthday is not complete without a cake, in this case a giant 7 ft high specimen. But the one who enjoyed himself the most that evening was Mickey himself. As pretty little girls lined up to give him gifts and posies of flowers, the rodent with the roving eye quipped: "That's why I left Minnie behind." Mice going Mickey.



Mickey Mouse: birthday bash

◆ Former cricketing pin-up **Sandeep Patil** doesn't believe in doing things by halves. Unless of course, it's the remains of a single-seater plane the innovative Patil acquired from the Juhu Flying Club and converted into a terrace bar. The US-built Queil Commander which met with an accident some time ago, has now got a wet lease of life. Says the proud barman: "I can actually boast of a real plane on my terrace. It's ideal for enjoying a quiet drink with friends." It sh certainly get them high!

Patil: flight of fancy

◆ He was on one o tireless humanitarian s when the news came— been nominate the prestigious Human R Award. In a t gesture, **Baba** 73, continued march leaving t dian Embassy cept the plaqu citation in Was ton. Amte, the Indian recipient chosen for "all ing the lot of and the disa said M. Bhan MP, who was o selection panel Magsaysay A winner is in a company—fello cipients being N and Winnie Man

Baba Amte: another la

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